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ENGLISH DRAMATIC FORM

By the same Author

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IBSEN, THE NORWEGIAN

SHAKESPEARE AND
ELIZABETHAN POETRY

ELIZABETHAN
STAGE CONDITIONS

THEMES AND CONVENTIONS OF
ELIZABETH TRAGEDY

THE SCHOOL OF NIGHT
(*A Study in the Literary Relations of Sir Walter Raleigh*)

ANDREW MARVELL
(*with M. G. Lloyd Thomas*)

JOSEPH CONRAD

T. S. ELIOT

SIR THOMAS MALORY

THE QUEEN'S GARLAND
(*An Anthology*)

THE GROWTH AND STRUCTURE
OF ELIZABETHAN COMEDY

THE RISE OF
THE COMMON PLAYER

ENGLISH DRAMATIC FORM

A HISTORY OF ITS DEVELOPMENT

By

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To
THE SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY
OF JAPAN

Preface

DRAMA today is full of experiment, springing from the actors' and audiences' part in total theatre. The author starts off an activity; he does not control it. This idea has spread from the French theatre, incomparably the most lively of the day, to others. Plays are conceived in terms of action and response.

My theory of the drama as a species of game implies none the less that the claim of the playwright must be maintained, against the modern counterclaims of the director, if no longer in quite the old terms. "The poetry behind the text" derives from the text.

I do not know of any recent psychological theory of drama, and therefore in writing Part One I have relied solely on the work of psychiatrists and psychologists. I am very conscious of my temerity, and I have been extremely grateful to Dr D. H. Heard of the Tavistock Clinic for sparing time to read Chapter 2 and giving me advice upon it.

In Part Two, I have tried to show how the great imaginative drama of Marlowe and Shakespeare rested upon two medieval traditions; processional civic pageants and courtly games which received poetic form from Chaucer. In relating Chaucer and Shakespeare I have considered the imaginative effect upon their audiences of characters projected as an interacting group.

In Part Three, from the time when imaginative theatre revived to the present day, I have been more concerned with the development of the theatre as a whole than in Part Two, which depends on selected plays of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Webster and Dryden. But in Part Three I have also specially considered two poets, Yeats and Eliot, whose influence rests

on a transfusion of imaginative life, not confined to their own achievements as dramatists nor to drama in verse. The modern form of imaginative drama is more often prose.

Each part, representing an approach to a different kind of material, has necessarily been written in a somewhat different way, but the case is none the less a single one, and I hope the connexions between the different parts will be apparent.

While this book was in proof, the Aldwych plays of 1964 showed how earnestly preaching has begun on some of the matters handled in Chapters 2 and 10. Seventy years ago Strindberg recognised the imaginative basis upon which, in *The Murder of Marat*, his disciple Weiss has built a play—and filled it with statement and doctrine in the manner of Brecht. As the epilogue puts it:

> Everything that we see and hear
> Can add to or increase us in some way,
> And so it might be with this play.
> Some seeds have drifted from our stage. A few
> May even have entered and taken root in you.
> But what these seeds are—even though
> In your darkest places they feed and grow,
> Whatever these seeds are—you will never know.

M. C. Bradbrook

Cambridge, October 1964

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PART ONE

A Psychological Theory of Drama

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

I THE ICON AND THE DREAM

THE dramatist, it has been said, by the intensity of imaginative experience, enters ideally into the minds of all his characters and speaks from within them. His own reading of life cannot be extracted from the drama in which it is embodied; but so fully has he entered the world of his play that what he reveals within its framework seems to be only a part of what he knows about his characters, as what a man reveals within any one action is only a part of what he is. The dramatist "knowing in each the image of a living creature, and knowing it far beyond the purposes for which he uses it on the surface of the play", (1) seeks response through a technique of evocation rather than of statement. The unfocused aspects of character work within the minds of those who encounter them, like yeast in bread.

No literary form can be thought of as if it could sustain the kind of definition given to physical objects, least of all drama, the most collaborative and therefore the most volatile of the arts. Yet, if used with discretion, descriptive terms may employ such words, and the drama may be seen as embodied on the stage. The Shakespearean form may be termed the drama of human relationships, since he has in the highest degree the capacity to enter into all his characters; but this evolved historically from two other forms, which I have termed Theatre of the Icon and Theatre of the Dream; these identifications cover the play in being as well as the dramatist's idea of it. They include the response of the audience, as part of the play. For the history of the drama is the history of interaction between the author's imagination, the actor's skill and the spectators' expectation. The conjunction of all these

issues from and evokes an inner drama that is played by each of the actors and each member of the audience.

Medieval pageantry—the plays of the craft guilds being its most developed kind—employed speaking as only one of the properties (as it is today in the "total theatre" of Barrault). The personages were identified by traditional garments, postures and emblems—St Catharine's wheel, St Barbara's tower; they were heroic but familiar. Such icons represent the ideals or fears of a community; the Manger, the Pietà, St George and his dragon are still familiar today. In drama, the icons lead to plays of heroic monolithic design; the central character, though humiliated by the vulnerability of human flesh, wears a heroic mask. Marlowe created his theatre largely within this tradition, and Tamburlaine the Great is a figure at once traditional and new; traditional in conception, new in poetic power and action.

The medieval ritual of the dream began in courtly games and ceremonies, which raised life towards the level of poetry. Chaucer read his poems to an audience who were themselves the subjects of his verse, but who saw themselves reflected in an idealized form. John of Gaunt acted his silent rôle as the elegy for his wife was recited to him in the midst of their household. The audience of courtly poetry provided both spectators and dumb actors for the poet-presenter, who, in his dream-visions presented an interior drama, a drama of sentiment and feeling rather than of history. Free from the limits of mundane possibility, it constituted a special kind of fantastic "game".

The icon inhabits an eternal present, but the ritual of the dream follows a story. The icon may be attached to a simple story or myth, which does not need to be enacted in full, but can be presented by a tableau; in the dream, the rôles are conventional —for instance, the knight, the lady, the monster —but the adventures are endless.

The Icon offers a tragic form, the Dream vision more fre-

quently is comic. Marlowe, the great dramatist of the Icon, Chaucer and Lyly, poet and dramatist of the Dream vision, the courtly game, each assumed full participation. Alleyn as Tamburlaine dominated his audience, compelled attention by his presence and voice—though the style did not persist, and Hamlet compares it to the town crier's proclamation (2). The audience of Chaucer and Lyly saw themselves reflected in the "shadows" of the poem, which projected actual relationships; the Dreamer himself was only the means of entering a world in which he might not play a central part. The interplay of characters within a developing narrative (though not a logical one), and the contrast between the world of the play and the world outside it, when transferred to the later drama, produced the mirror effect of the play within the play, which in *The Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, is combined with the idea of the play as dream.

Shakespeare brought the drama to full life, while the wilder hyperbole of medieval romance persisted in a popular form, subjected to the ironic critical parody of a society which by now played the old games in new ways (3).

The Bardic audience which had listened to sung or recited romance, sought traditional ideals, realized in habit; the courtly audience had always enjoyed debate. Poetry was an enlargement of the daily world, an imaginative vision either communal, or subtle and more individual. It was also not an experience, but a performance.

The delicate balance which Shakespeare established did not long survive his day; in the plays of Webster and Jonson i is beginning to tilt towards the icon in a new form. In the heroic plays of Dryden, the wheel has come full circle, while Restoration comedy briefly revived something of a courtly game. By the latter part of the seventeenth century, dramatic form had congealed. *Tamburlaine* (1587) and *Aurengzebe* (1675) may be held to define the limits of the first great age of English dramatic form.

The theatre survived and flourished as a social institution, and so continued for about two hundred years. In the eighteenth century and the greater part of the nineteenth century, the English theatre was devoid of literary originality; it lived on scenic tradition and shrivelled reproductions of Shakespearean forms.

2 MODERN DRAMA

When, at the end of the nineteenth century, the art of imaginative playwriting was revived, it was necessary to recreate traditions for actors and audience. By now, theatre was an international art. The genuine national traditions of earlier times, including the English tradition, became absorbed; Italian comedy alone retained some independence. In the nineteenth century, Paris supplied a common centre of theatrical life, but the dramatists themselves came from lands on the fringe and periphery of Europe—from Russia, Scandinavia, Ireland, Sicily. They were nourished by the experimental stage and the critical traditions of Paris.

The two greatest dramatists of the nineteenth century, Ibsen and Chekhov, worked for the picture stages of the time. The audience, in their silent and darkened auditorium, watched a peepshow in the little lighted box before them, but were drawn into Ibsen's plays by the problems he raised; they were intellectually disturbed, even outraged. Ibsen made his reputation as a bold iconoclast, and as a "thinker"; the imaginative and poetic qualities of his plays, which have ensured their survival, were hardly noticed by Shaw and other *avant garde* writers of the 'nineties who introduced them to the English stage. The theme of tragic sacrifice in *The Wild Duck* and *Rosmersholm*, that "hunger of the imagination that preys upon life" and the demonic presence of the dead within living minds found symbolic form in offstage scenes—the ocean depths of the dusty attic where the Wild Duck splashed its

broken wing, the haunted white waters of the mill-race grinding the corn and receiving upon the thunder of its spray the imprint of galloping white horses who were the returning dead.

It is these poetic images of life and death which have maintained Ibsen; and in the form they took they were translatable. It was his great good fortune to return from verse to prose and to move all the poetic statement of his plays into these imagined forms, or into the form of stage objects—Rebecca's white shawl (bridal veil and shroud), or the pistols of Hedda Gabler.

Chekhov relied upon the acting of the Moscow Arts Theatre to present his delicate and subtle prose poems, where problems have vanished and only questions remain. The pathos of the inarticulate, of the unstated, shown in the speech of characters who do not communicate with each other, requires prose. Yet the achievements of Ibsen and Chekhov, though their greatness was recognized, did not lead to the recognition that, in the modern imaginative theatre, full drama could be achieved without verse.

Consequently, attempts to re-establish the theatre in England as an imaginative form were led by lyric poets. The two great English poets of modern times, Yeats and Eliot, who have striven to restore poetic life to the theatre, succeeded in creating a situation where drama of the imagination became possible. Their criticism and their practical interest in the stage supplied an incentive and an example to others; they were propagandists for the imaginative drama as well as practitioners, and perhaps their greatest service has been in what they made it possible for others to do. They held the vital clue that drama should work by evocation, not by statement; they came to learn that action is centred within the spectators, each one responding as an individual. Eliot in particular insisted on the audience's right to its own interpretation, as being of equal validity with the poet's.

Long after the subjective principle had been recognized pragmatically in the work of Strindberg, and Pirandello, it received full formulation in the work of Existentialists. Interior drama, by transforming the rôle of the spectator from a passive to an active one, has also transformed the relation of actor, dramatist and audience.

Within the last dozen years, theatre has evolved an analogous form to the medieval "game"; for the play is now a game played between actors and audience with material provided by the dramatist. The rules of the game, like the rules of civilized conversation, are flexible.

This new theatre is once again centred in Paris, as the product of an international group. Beckett was born in Dublin, Ionesco in Roumania, Adamov in Kislovodsk, Arrabal in Spain, Schéhadé in the Lebanon, Tardieu and Pinget in Switzerland, Ghelderode in Belgium (4).

In Weiss, Genet, Gelber, the audience are reminded of theatrical illusion by some sort of play within the play. They are involved in an action which is itself fantastic, irrational ritual, and within this, they are shown a play. Beckett makes use of stage clowns, Genet uses masks.

The play produces its effect, not as witnessed story, but as direct Act. Although completely different in intention, the great influence of Brecht has also been exerted to disturb and probe, to set before the audience the needs for decision and action. His technique of alienation alerts them; and equally with the French anti-theatre (which also likes to label itself anti-Brecht) he would reject the psychological study of characters in favour of a drama of situation.

Because the theatre now calls directly upon the more primitive forms of communication, upon contact and rapport, upon gesture and direct appeal to preconscious levels of engagement, the words of the play give only a part of the writer's original statement. Artaud's collected manifestoes, which Barrault termed the most important writings on the modern

theatre, recall the primitive level of the action as the most serious. All is summed up in the opening sentence of the First Manifesto:

> We cannot go on prostituting the idea of the theatre, whose only value is in its excruciating, magical relation to reality and danger.
>
> Instead of continuing to rely upon texts considered definitive and sacred, it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language, half way between gesture and thought.
>
> *The Theatre and its Double*, tr. Richards (1958), p. 89.

He cites, as an example of pure theatre, the Balinese, with its devil masks and ritual movement: his "theatre of cruelty" sought to project the "actual poetry" behind the "poetry of the texts" as the Aldwych plays do now.

In Barrault's "total theatre" the text has not been displaced to this extent—the great productions of Claudel's plays alone would prove the contrary. But the audience is involved by shock and by calling out what is below the civilized, trained level of response in the plays of such very different writers as Genet, Ionesco, Beckett, Pinter, Gelber and Albee.

For reasons which the next chapter will indicate, I cannot accept this subjugation of language to more primitive forms of communication, though I think the recognition that they exist and their integration with speech is the great achievement of the modern theatre.

When Jan Kott can praise *Titus Andronicus* as great Shakespearean theatre—"il savait déjà modeler de grandes figures, mais il était encore incapable de donner toute leur voix à ces géants . . . c'est déjà le théâtre shakespearien, ce n'est pas encore le texte shakespearien" (5), it may be seen how far the theories of Artaud could influence the reading of a great

dramatist. Kott goes on to suggest that the cinema gives a more authentic form to Shakespeare than the stage, and that Olivier's films are more true than any theatre could be to the particular Shakespeare of our time, "Un Shakespeare cruel et vrai".

The Royal Shakespeare Theatre's performances have largely spread these views—a *King Lear* in which Edmund is allowed no repentance, a *Henry VI* which is true to the old seventeenth-century traditions of "Shakespeare Improved". The period in which the script dominated in the theatre has been remarkably brief; perhaps a hundred years.

It is undeniable that Shakespeare is somehow important to the most extraordinary range of people—that his plays are adapted by West Indian negroes and Russians of the steppes, who can have slight access either to the language or the social assumptions behind the plays. The Russian Academician Samarin made the point at Stratford that a Russian Shakespeare is as legitimate as an English Chekhov (6).

The degree of divergence in individual interpretation that is compatible with taking part in a public performance is difficult fully to grasp; in the case of Shakespeare such variety of interpretation extends not only between person and person, but between different periods and different countries. Tolerance and acceptance of different versions must be dependent on whether the new interpretation shows some initial respect and attention to the author's intentions, as transmitted in his words—the kind of respect and attention that in human relations would provide the basis of mutual understanding. The poet provides a permanent substratum, upon which infinite variations are possible, but "the poetry behind the texts" is accessible only through the texts.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

(1) Una Ellis Fermor, *Shakespeare the Dramatist* (1961), p. 58. This passage is generally indebted to the late Miss Ellis Fermor's perceptive study.

(2) For a study of Alleyn's style, based on Hamlet's speech to the player, see A. Gurr, "Who Strutted and Bellowed?" (*Shakespeare Survey*, 16 (1963)). For another discussion of this speech which has bearings on the acting, and which is discussed below, Chapter III, p. 57, see Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet* (Oxford 1959).

(3) See below, Chapter IV, p. 70, for a discussion of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and the Jacobean court masque. For games as art, cf. Ninian Smart and Ruth Saw, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, III, 4 (October, 1963).

(4) R. N. Coe, *Ionesco* (1961), p. 40.

(5) Jan Kott, *Shakespeare notre Contemporain* (René Julliard, Paris, 1962), pp. 260 ff. The theories of M. Kott have some likeness to the plays of Adamov, especially such early works as *La Grande et la Petite Manoeuvre*.

(6) See R. M. Samarin in *Shakespeare Survey*, 16 (1963).

Chapter Two

THE INNER AND THE OUTER DRAMA

I THE "INTERNAL SOCIETY"

SPECTATORS of a play, who participate in its collective action, together with the actors, go through a curve of experience traced for them by the author. At the end they reach

> A condition at once exuberant and reposed: the sense of having passed through a great experience, one which testifies to the superb wealth and range of life, and to the splendid rather than the disastrous powers of man. . . .
>
> Such a work is not a statement or insight or special kind of information—not these things essentially, though it may be all of them incidentally—but is momentous and energising *experience* . . . before it is a source of insight, great imaginative literature is a source of *power* . . . inviting and demanding an intense and varied emotion, a general heightening of all the powers of apprehension, and a great access of life-giving energy.
>
> John Holloway, *The Story of the Night*, pp. 17–19.

To become absorbed in such an experience collectively is a natural strengthening of personal security; it affirms their *existenz* to each of the participants, at the same time that it offers them a common cohesion. This is the life-bearing aspect of ritual—which at its primary level is shared by the theatre with tribal dancing, popular games and primitive religious ceremonies.

At the finer levels of organization which are recognized as art, however, powerful collective responses do not submerge the identity of the participants. Each within himself acts his intrapersonal drama, which may indeed make a strong sensi-

tive impress on those about him; the quality of attentiveness is certainly felt by the actors, as the "feel" of the "house" comes over.

For certain societies, where "people live from their affects" and "the ego has almost no autonomy" (1), group life is held together by emotion, and participation in any such ritual is likely to be expressed by gestures, cries and a loss of the distinction between actors and spectators. Collective experience will submerge personal response.

For those societies where individuated structure has developed strongly, a complex group of dramatic characters in action will evoke variant patterns of action within each member of the audience.

First projected by the writer's inner vision, then interpreted by the actors, the characters are reformed within each spectator, and move there dynamically, in accordance with the drama of his own "Internal Society".

For within each individual there plays a private drama, following established habits but responding also to external stimulus. These inward images that shape and dominate the deeper levels of thought and feeling in everyone have been implanted in childhood; and though differently charged with love or hate, and differently grouped, are basically the same in all. The formation of a coherent personality depends upon the satisfactory integration of this "Inner Society" round a core, which is the centre of being; in other words, upon confidence and ontological security, originally given to the child by its relation with its mother.

> Speaking descriptively, the ego is a boundary phenomenon between an internal world (an internal society it might be called, since the unconscious seems to be almost exclusively preoccupied with personal relationships) and an external world revealed through the sense organs. . . . These internalized objects may be pictured as having an arrangement in depth; the most primitive are the most deeply buried,

but with each "layer" (representing a phase of development) influencing the deposition of, and the freedom of movement in the more superficial layers above it (2); furthermore and more difficult to conceive, in each layer the same objects (the parents, siblings and other relations or their surrogates are always the central figures) reoccur again and again. . . . Achievements, however sublime or base, are not made alone for their effect on contemporary society or posterity, but also to adjust the relations of the "internal society".

John Rickman, *Selected Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Scott, 1957, p. 159.

Parts of the internal society may form the basis of relations with other people; others may form the basis for general social activities, e.g. in the case of one who "takes after" a parent in occupation or interest. There are also the satellite selves, dark stars which never come to light; these deeply buried or subsidiary or rejected forms may yet exert a powerful gravitational pull which will affect conscious life. Not all these dark forms, certainly, are hostile to the conscious light of day, but some are; these enjoy play in fantasy only, without access to the level of overt decision or willed action, or verbal formulation; they will appear in symbolic forms, in dreams or in the primitive language of gesture or "pantomime".

2 FANTASY AND IMAGINATION

All action and experience involves a certain amount of imagination and of fantasy, that is of both conscious and unconscious experiences which take the form of plastic images (representing the Internal Society) and dramatic representations. Fantasy is not merely what is popularly known as "wish-fulfilment", it is a means of conjoining the buried selves to any and every action. Fantasy therefore exerts a continuous influence both with adjusted and maladjusted persons,

the difference lying in the specific characters of the dominant fantasies, the desire or anxiety associated with them, and their interplay with each other and with external reality (3). In normal characters, fantasies are neither perceived by themselves or by others, but operate like breathing, heartbeat, digestion and other unconscious vital processes; only when they erupt through the consciousness of a disordered personality do they become a source of discomfort and perhaps of danger. In general, fantasy is like a lubricant for the bolts and hinges of life. A mature relationship is not one devoid of fantasy, but one in which fantasy is regulated and allowed to soften the difficulties without destroying the firmness of the main structure. The normal amount of fantasy in any one life may vary at different times and places, and will depend on temperament. It is joined to imagination (the conscious aspect of this process) in more intimate relationships. Lovers may play at children's games together, or play at being children; in Genet's *The Balcony* and the brothel sequence of *Ulysses*, gross fantasies are indulged in as sexual games.

When two individuals meet whose fantasies complement each other, they will be able to enjoy at least that form of happiness which is "the perpetual possession of being well deceived". The person who needs to be thought important and the person who needs someone to look up to may succeed in satisfying each other, whatever the world may think of both, and notwithstanding the possibility that the "hero" may be extremely inefficient or dependent in other ways upon the hero-worshipper. Fantasy will reinforce, underlie and sustain a planned course of activity.

At a slightly higher level, dreaming or day-dreaming may help to solve problems of living by bringing the primitive parts of the mind to bear upon a problem; dreams may point towards a real solution, and need not represent merely the sort of gratification that a hungry baby may obtain for a short

time by sucking its thumb (4). Eccentricities of dress, or of personal equipment (such as cars and pets) may, as Bacon said of poetry, "give some show of satisfaction to the mind, wherein the nature of things doth seem to deny it".

3 THE INNER CONFLICT

The levels of conflict within the ordinary person include those caused by outward events, "the nature of things"; by the imaginative or fantasy systems of others impinging on himself in his relationships; the acknowledged conflicts of his own contradictory impulses, divided wishes and fears, duty and pleasure; the conflicts between the light and the dark, the conscious and unconscious parts of his being; conflicts totally inaccessible.

Transformation at lower levels will bring new adjustment at higher levels—this is the purpose of psychotherapy, which aims at altering behaviour. Transformation of the conscious rôles will regroup, strengthen or diminish the "satellite selves". Flexibility of engagement or withdrawal, of commitment and playfulness, of perseverence and adaptation, belong only to stable personalities. Where the foundations are insecure, there must be a compensatory rigidity in the superstructure. "But the tragic paradox is that the more the self is defended in this way, the more it is destroyed" (5).

The unhappy being who experiences the torments of a deeply divided self will have to protect his vulnerable core, his inner self by playing an act or assuming a false self in ordinary life; he splits into two halves, the secret inner self, and the outer manipulated rôles with which he faces the world. The separate parts of his Internal Society are liable to break off and appear as eccentric aspects of his public self, which distort and finally disrupt any appearance of conformity. In a schizophrenic these various selves may appear to hold dialogues with each other, so that apparently discon-

nected ravings can be interpreted as a dialogue. As examples of sanity and of creative art, such poems as Andrew Marvell's *Dialogue between Soul and Body* or Yeats's *Dialogue between Self and Soul* may be compared with the following family "dialogue" between a mother and two daughters in the mind of the younger daughter, a chronic schizophrenic.

> In listening to Julie, it was often as though one were doing group psychotherapy with one patient . . . it seemed one was in the presence of various fragments, or incomplete elements or different personalities in operation at the same time . . . Julie seemed to speak of herself in the first, second or third person. . . . One of the simplest instances . . . is seen when she issued herself an order and proceeded to obey it. Thus "she" would say "Sit down, stand up", and "she" would sit down and stand up . . . or "she" would say something which "she" would greet with derisive laughter, System A would say to me "She's a Royal Queen" while System B laughs derisively.
>
> There was the peremptory bully who was always ordering her about; the same peremptory voice would make endless complaints to me about "this child": "this is a wicked child. This child is wasted time. This child is just a cheap tart. You'll never do anything with this child" . . . it was evident that this bullying figure within her was for much of the time "the boss". . . . She was basically an internal female persecutor who contained in concentrated form all the bad that Julie ascribed to her mother.
>
> Two other partial systems could be readily identified. One fulfilled the rôle of an advocate on her behalf to me, and a protector or buffer against persecution. "She" frequently referred to Julie as her little sister. . . . The third partial system that I shall introduce was an entirely good, compliant, propitiating little girl . . . a derivative very similar to the false self [of earlier stages]. When this system spoke, "she" said "I'm a good girl, I go to the lavatory regularly."

There were derivatives also of what seemed to have been an "inner" self; finally . . . there were periods of precarious sanity when she spoke in a pathetically scared, barely audible tone, but seemed to be more nearly speaking "in her own person" than at any other time.

"I was born under a black sun. I wasn't born, I was crushed out. It's not one of those things you get over like that. I wasn't mothered, I was smothered. She wasn't a mother. I'm choosey who I have for a mother. Stop it. Stop it. She's killing me. She's cutting out my tongue. I'm rotten, base, I'm wicked. I'm wasted time."

The first six sentences are spoken sanely. Suddenly she appears to be subjected to some terrifying attack, presumably from the bad mother. She breaks off—"Stop it, stop it." Addressing me, "She's killing me." Then . . . her bad mother's condemnation of her. . . .

R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, pp. 214–20.

Intrapersonal conflict may be expressed in certain forms of psychotherapy; the use of socio-dramatic techniques for group therapy by J. L. Moreno utilize "the inescapable emotional tie uniting actors and audience" (see J. L. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive?* New York, 1953). The school for maladjusted children at Fleury, near Paris, used masks, which were made and assumed by the children to dramatize their troubles. External conflicts may also be assisted by being symbolized or debated in group therapy; a simple case, two strangers with marital difficulties succeeded in discussing things together which they were unable to face with their partners (S. H. Foukes and E. J. Antony, *Group Psycho-Therapy*, 1957, p. 231). In some forms of therapy, the analyst and an assistant may engage in dramas with the patient (for it is a curious fact, especially curious in view of three being the standard number of actors of Greek drama, that three is the basic number of figures required in the therapeutic situation, although one may be present only in fantasy) (6).

4 THE PUBLIC PLAY

Anything which can be expressed in verbal terms is on the way to integration; the earliest and the terminal stages of schizophrenia are speechless. In ordinary persons the darker and more primitive, the remote and outlying aspects of the self can be expressed only in more primitive forms, in pantomimic gesture or wordless cries. Language is a delicate and complicated tool, and anything which can be handled by this tool must be relatively accessible to reshaping. Hence the importance in any curative process of the patient's ability to recognize a situation by putting it into words (especially the release of emotion from a pre-verbal era of life).

Laing says of one psychotic young man that the only situation in which he could let himself go was in listening to jazz (op. cit., p. 52). Primitive dances, beating of drums with cries and gesticulation, may be powerful collective integrators.

The engagement or participation of spectator and actor in drama includes these primitive elements, which belong especially to the Chorus of early plays, but unites them with the power of speech, of narrative, of a series of events that approximates more elaborately than in any other form of art to "reality"; that is closest to an imitation of life. Hence its peculiar potency in reconciling primitive and advanced modes of expression.

The difference of effect between drama which is merely entertainment and drama which is art lies in the complexity and degree of tolerated conflict involved by the spectators' participation in the action.

> Everyone who has observed the gallery during [a melodrama] is aware that its inmates are living on the stage, and always of course, in the part of the hero or heroine. The illusion of reality which attaches to the play allows the daydreaming to be conducted much more efficiently than in the case of the novel. . . .

> If we rise higher in the scale of art . . . the reader no longer identifies himself merely with the hero, but rather with all the characters at once. He finds portrayed the complexes or partial tendencies that exist in his own mind —and in the action of the novel he reads the conflicts and struggles which he experiences in his own life. . . . The reason that such productions appeal only to a limited class is that they presuppose in their audience the possession of mental processes sufficiently complicated to enable this identification to occur.
>
> Bernard Hart, *The Psychology of Insanity* (5th ed., 1957), p. 116.

Owing to their participation as part of an audience, it appears possible for people to gain from drama what they could not gain from other forms of art, for their level of appreciation is raised (not necessarily consciously) by the actors' interpretation and by the transmitted response of the other spectators. Among its other advantages, therefore, drama enlarges the territory of the individual sensibility.

Drama may evoke both superficial and deeply buried "satellite selves", so that internal conflicts may be worked out to a more harmonious adjustment, a regrouping of impulses, a harmonizing of partial systems.

In this way, participation may correspond to the therapeutic function of a dream (7), and the final result will not by any means be just a fantasy gratification. The play dynamically frees and flexes relatively fixed and rigid images of the inner society. Therefore, if several rôles attract identification, the plot becomes an exercise in the dynamics of adjustment, uniquely assisted by the fact that participation in drama is itself a social act. Conflicts can be projected more directly and more intensively.

It cannot be expected that a given play will precisely correspond with the needs of any individual or at least, the odds are against it. Nevertheless, the result will not be fantasy

gratification alone; it will be a return, through the release afforded by the exercise of fantasy in a context suggesting reality, to full reality. As the maladjusted are encouraged to express their fantasies in direct analysis, or as personal difficulties may be directly handled in group therapy (8), so response to a play can strengthen inner freedom and balance among the participants. In particular, the multiplicity of layers in a good performance, the degree with which various aspects of the plot and characters are realized and the degree to which they are only suggested or mimed or "floated in" as part of the spectacle, will greatly widen the area of communication and the possibility of individual selection by each member of the audience.

The degree of flexibility and adjustment which the play itself provides will depend partly on mounting and production. It will depend even more on the basis supplied by the author —although a great actor can transform a mediocre script, particularly if it has obvious connexions with the emotional preoccupations of the audience.

The language of a great poet will include latent and half-focused imagery, a wide power of suggestion and a controlling rhythm. In addition, his characters and actions will be set in some kind of natural perspective, some being more prominent and many-sided, others toned down, or faded out; so that the scope for reinterpretation is extended, even for the simpler members of the audience. Moreover, the dramatist can make use of silence, of irony, so that "what he reveals within the framework of the play seems to be only a part of what he knows" (9).

A play which draws largely on traditional materials, which contains heroic figures, which assumes or maintains relatively inflexible codes of behaviour will embody fantasies associated with conscience; while an inconsequent, improvised dream-play will more probably embody primitive gratifications. The theatre of the idol and the theatre of the dream show the

constituent bias which underlies them. Between them lies the great theatre of men and women, where fantasy has great freedom and where imaginative and realistic elements are more elaborately varied; where the two deviant forms are united.

The Hero and Chorus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* have been compared by two analysts with the leader and group in ordinary communities, and with the leader and the group in group-therapy. The Chorus is relatively helpless, but the Hero, who both embodies its forbidden wishes and also takes decisions which resolve the conflict, enables the Chorus finally to regain the power of action (10). These observations were more entertainingly recognized by A. E. Housman in his *Fragment of Greek Tragedy*:

CHORUS
STROPHE: In speculation
I would not willingly acquire a name
For ill-digested thought:
But after pondering much
To this conclusion I at last have come,
Life is uncertain.
This truth I have written deep
In my reflective midriff,
On tablets not of wax,
Nor with a pen did I inscribe it there.

Its native ingenuity sufficed
My well-taught diaphragm.
ERIPHYLA (within):
O, I am smitten with a hatchet's jaw,
And that in deed and not in word alone.
CHORUS: I thought I heard a sound within the house,
Unlike the sound of one that jumps for joy.
ERIPHYLA: He splits my skull, not in a friendly way,
Once more; he purposes to strike me dead.
CHORUS: I would not be reported rash; but yet
I doubt if all be well within the house.

ERIPHYLA: O, O, another stroke, that makes the third.
He stabs me to the heart against my wish.
CHORUS: If that be so, thy state of health is poor,
But thine arithmetic is quite correct.

At appropriate moments, some equally blinding glimpse of the obvious may strike a spectator, because it chimes with his inner needs. It is not often that the direct action of the plot will have this effect; a change of heart or a change of opinion is not the purpose of art. G. B. Shaw boasted that the lives of spectators had been changed by witnessing his plays; there had been some sort of conversion—and they had been moved to join a good cause, sign a cheque, leave or reassume the path of virtue (11). Such decisions may be precipitated by a play, but they are not its highest way of working. It is this exceptional process that Hamlet proposes to employ against his uncle:

I have heard
That guilty creature sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been so struck to the soul, that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions. . . .

Such sharp and direct results are at the opposite end of the scale from the subtle and largely unperceived flexing and regrouping of impulse on many different levels, which those who are moderately integrated can enjoy from "the great access of life-giving energy, testifying to the superb wealth and range of life, and to the splendid rather than the disastrous powers of man".

5 THE AUTHOR AND THE ACTORS

For the author, composition may well prove a difficult and painful process; his creative act may involve the recovery of deeply-buried material, the overcoming of inner resistance. T. S. Eliot has said:

> What you start from is nothing so definite as an emotion in the ordinary sense; it is still more certainly not an idea; it is . . .
>
> *a bodiless childful of life in the gloom*
> *Crying with frog voice, 'what shall I be?'*
>
> . . . he (the writer) is oppressed by a burden which he must bring to birth in order to obtain relief . . . and when the words are finally arranged in the right way . . . he may experience a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and of something which is very near annihilation, which is in itself indescribable. . . . It is likely of course, that it is in the beginning the pressure of some rude unknown *psychic material* that directs the poet to tell that particular story, to develop that particular situation. And, on the other hand, the frame once chosen . . . may itself evoke other psychic material. . . . All that matters is that the voices in the end should be heard in harmony; and I have said, I doubt whether in any real poem only one voice is audible.
>
> "The Three Voices of Poetry" (*On Poetry and Poets*, 1957, pp. 98–101).

This account would not apply to poets of easy and ready habits in composition, more of whose organizing has been done at a preconscious level. Such was probably the case with Shakespeare (12). But Milton's "Bardic voice", the lofty and remote accents of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*—which have the effect of evoking an invisible audience—enable him perhaps to bring together, as otherwise he could not have done, themes of the largest public significance with some very intimate personal experience. The lovers in Eden, Samson and Delilah, Satan cast down, have obvious personal implications, but they are enlarged to heroic scale, they are distanced, by a ritualized form of speech (13).

The process of composition, as it is experienced by any artist, is difficult to describe without sounding banal, but

there appears generally a large element of the "given" as well as the kind of struggle described by Eliot (14).

Among the main types of actor and theories of acting, there is the type defined by Diderot in *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, who does not in any way identify himself with his part, and the one who, like the First Actor in *Hamlet* (and reputedly, Richard Burbage), sheds real tears. Both types, however, are dependent upon response from the audience. Ideally, it may be hazarded, neither the personality of the author nor of the actor should obtrude in the final total experience; they should be fused in the great collective experience, the activity of the play-in-being.

Although the ideas and observations of psychology and psychiatry may throw light on the dramatic process of play-going and playwriting it is obviously impossible to apply them to plays. Various systems of psychiatry, which may be used to give a reductive account of maladjusted individuals, with the object of bringing about an adjustment in their behaviour, are not applicable to works of art, which are not susceptible of the kind of scrutiny and dynamic tests that a living being responds to. Nor can the author be directly interrogated by a study of his work, which may reflect quite a different aspect of himself from that realized in behaviour or formulated in beliefs. In a play, a much greater degree of paradox can be tolerated than would be acceptable as an intellectual belief.

More especially the attempt directly to apply psychiatric theories is too often a method of gratifying some particular interest (15). A tentative approach to some well-marked historic phases of the drama has been offered here, in the hope that it will enable the reader more clearly to distinguish the nature and effect of the plays; not to give an explanation of their origins.

Although among the more persistent forms of art, the theatre is notably liable to brief periods of great activity and

splendour that seldom last more than half a century, interspersed with long periods of static activity, decline or even eclipse. At any given time, the theatre may function as an open or a relatively closed institution, the plays may be traditional and few in number, frequently repeated; or they may succeed each other in great profusion. Therefore, in considering primarily two periods of great fertility—the High Renaissance and Baroque, roughly 1580–1680, and the modern theatre of the last hundred years—I have chosen a few selected examples from these periods, more in the hope that my hypothesis will throw light on the examples, than that the examples will establish my hypothesis.

By the dramatists' own self-effacement in their action, by the opportunities given for collaboration of actors and spectators, drama is the most "open" of the arts. This openness is shown in the characteristic speech of drama, which is not that of exposition, but of implication. Dramatic speech must of its nature be highly condensed and richly evocative, so that a single line may reverberate and link with the whole poetic movement, in the speech of other characters. The flash of revelation—the "Qu'il mourût!" of *Horace*, the "Consummatum est!" of *Faustus*—or the loaded richness of "Absent thee from felicity awhile", "His delights were dolphin-like", open out upon a whole play. This quality of poetic drama, which ensures the strongest possible local effect with the strongest possible degree of unity and integration in the work as a whole, brings about full harmony of performance, the "power to move men, to touch the depth of their imaginations, to free them and to set at work the powers of life" (16).

For if language is a delicate and complicated tool, compared with gesture, display or costume, the language of the poetic dramatist is to that of ordinary speech, as ordinary speech to the disconnected first words of the infant.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

(1) C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 1963, p. 228 (speaking of N. Africa).

(2) One way of picturing the layers is the autocosmic (or autistic), when external objects are not separate from the body: the microcosmic, when objects can be magically transformed at will: and the macrocosmic, in which the independence and stability of the external world is recognized. A story which illustrates how the Internal Society forms tells of a small boy who came to his father's room at an early hour and was sent back to his own bed. Hearing murmurs, the father got up and went to the child's room. He was lying down, but stuck a leg out of bed, and then addressed it severely, "Don't dare to get up till half past seven!" He then drew back the offending limb, and repeated this game.

(3) Susan Isaacs, "The Nature and Function of Phantasy" in *Developments in Psycho-Analysis*, ed. J. Rivière, 1952.

(4) See J. A. Hadfield, *Dreams and Nightmares*, 1954, Part II.

(5) R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 1960, p. 81. See, in this work, Chapters V, VI, XI (the last is quoted below).

(6) Rickman, op. cit., p. 152; R. D. Laing, *The Self and Others*, 1961, p. 140.

(7) See J. A. Hadfield, *Dreams and Nightmares*, 1954, Part II.

(8) See S. H. Foulkes and E. J. Antony, *Group Psychotherapy*, 1957, Chapter 8, on communication at twelve levels.

(9) Una Ellis Fermor, *Shakespeare the Dramatist*, 1961, p. 16. Her whole discussion of the implications of character are relevant here. cf. also John Bayley, *The Characters of Love*, 1960, Chapter I, pp. 7–8 particularly.

(10) J. Friedman and S. Gassel, *Psycho Analytical Quarterly*, vol. XIX, No. 2, New York, 1950. "The chorus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*."

(11) Another form of irrelevant direct response is that of the schoolgirl or schoolboy who develops a passion for a particular actor; who proceeds to imitate the appearance, cherish the photograph, or write "fan mail".

(12) See D. W. Harding, "The Hinterland of Thought" in *Experience into Words* (1963).

(13) Incidentally the Chorus of *Samson Agonistes* provides a notable example of how this passive element can take on new life at the end of the drama. The final speech of the Chorus is pure triumph.

(14) See Rosamond Harding, *The Anatomy of Inspiration* (1940), pp. 13–16.

(15) See Kenneth Muir, "Some Freudian Interpretations of Shakespeare" in *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical Society*, vol. VII, Part I, July 1952, pp. 43–52 for a discussion of some psychiatrists' deductions.

(16) Una Ellis Fermor, op. cit., p. 4.

PART TWO

The Evolution of Poetic Drama

Chapter Three

THE INHERITANCE OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

I PAGEANTRY AND THE SACRED IMAGE

FULL poetic drama did not emerge in England till the time of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Before this, there were pageants, with or without recited speech; there were poetic courtly games, and bardic sessions with the minstrels for the populace; there were moral dialogues and debates for the churchmen.

The basic conditions for full drama did not exist. Drama is metropolitan; it is the poetry of the City. This I take to be simply a historic fact; the theatre reached its greatest heights in fifth-century Athens, in Elizabethan London, in the Paris of Louis XIV; Ibsen, the one dramatist of the modern world who can be mentioned in the company of Sophocles, Shakespeare and Racine, attained full stature only when he left the north for Italy and Germany, the "new countries" of the nineteenth century. Ireland has produced great dramatists but until Dublin became a metropolis she produced no great drama; Sheridan and Goldsmith, Wilde and Shaw wrote for the London stage. Irish poetry sprang not from the great City, not even from the village, but from the shebeen in the hills. The harper and his song, ballad and romance flourish in such a land, as they also flourished in medieval England; the theatre was born in London.

City pageants, which London saw from Chaucer's day onwards, were triumphant ceremonies involving some human icon or idol. For a Royal Entry, the crowd waited in the narrow city streets, pressed round some conduit head or gatehouse upon which a gorgeous figure stood eminent; as the even more gorgeous procession approached, the pageant

image would move forward, like a clock wound up to strike, deliver a single speech and relapse into statuary once more. The figure might be human or wax; and in either case the speech might come from a Presenter with silver tipped verge or wand, who pointed out the "speakers" in turn and delivered their lines for them.

In religious feasts, the shaky but majestic pageant, trundling through the streets halted at set intervals and the figures of its dumb show "played"; their speech was proclamatory or narrative rather than fully dramatic. These animated figures reproduced those to be found in great churches: to walk round King's College Chapel at Cambridge or to look at the roof bosses in the transept of Norwich Cathedral is to progress through the pageant stations of a medieval play (1). This theatre lives yet in the processions of Holy Week at Seville, when the church images are carried from their shrines on gilded and flowerdecked pageants; each pageant, weighing about four tons and borne on the shoulders of forty men, advances haltingly through the narrow streets towards the Cathedral. As they converge in the winding Street of the Serpent, gypsies in the crowd break into their high song of greeting; it is a rite of participation, sustained for twelve hours a day throughout the seven days of the week, to the slow roll of drums. The chief part, however, is silent.

Each church sends out two pageants, baroque cars bearing waxen images. Christ's passion is presented in realistic sequence, one pageant from each church; alternating with these, in single glory, graciously bending forward under her royal canopy, banks of candles blazing before her, glides the youthful, waxen Queen of Heaven—image after image, blazing with jewels, the tears on her cheeks real pearls, her crown towering high, her rich embroidered mantle sweeping low. The Son is Human, agonized; the Mother is Divine, her grief transmuted into supernatural glory; while His crown of thorns stabs like the darts in the neck of the bull.

The slow movement, the menacing drum rolls, the regal glory aloft and the patient marching of the invisible human beasts of burden below build up in the packed crowd a single response, ponderous and utterly alien to modern susceptibilities. Many there have attended from infancy; layers of memory accumulate with each year. They settle down to wait for hours, creating their own social unity as they eat nuts and spit the shells about, or chat to their neighbours among the hooded fraternities who, bearing lighted candles or carrying crosses, are escorting the images. Sudden concentration tightens as an image approaches; the crowds rise and cross themselves, the gypsies' wailing song begins. All this tide of feeling beating on the image and rolling back in reflected power, animates the community in veneration; and the communal veneration of the image generates a dynamic akin to drama. It is possible only because the image is familiar, and because animated life is transferred to it by the occasion.

The most beloved of all the many Madonnas bears a scar on her left cheek, where in a frenzy of excitement a drunkard once hurled his glass at La Macarena as she passed by. For the next eight years he expiated this by walking in chains behind the image.

2 THE IMAGE OF THE "ETAYN"

Besides sacred images, the streets and castle halls of Chaucer's day knew Gog and Magog, Jack o' Lent with his crown of straw, and the wild green men or snorting dragons who burst into Christmas feasts. The city dragon is still to be seen in Norwich Castle. "Etayns" or monstrous giants still walk in Carnival time.

In the most splendid of all English romances, *Sir Gawain and the Grene Knight*, written by some north country poet of Chaucer's day, a gorgeous and terrifying figure rides into King Arthur's Christmas feast, after the King had given the

usual cue for the pageant-entry; he would not eat till he had seen a marvel. The head and trunk of the green and gold clad challenger were huge, his lower limbs were shapely and suited for horsemanship; his flowing hair and beard fell round him, like a cape, to elbow length. Was he really "half-etayn" or half a man and half a wicker frame? The crowd are uncertain, as he issues his Challenge to take and return a blow; for the playful decapitation of such a monster, as in a St George's play, would be quite feasible. After Gawain's blow has severed the head, and the crowd of revellers have kicked it round the hall like a football, an eerie menace is revealed. The headless knight picks up his own head, issues a fresh challenge, and gallops out. But the King and Gawain, putting on an appearance of nonchalance, "grin" at the sport which has trapped them, and Arthur reassures the Queen that if not an interlude, it was very much the same:

> *Wel bycommes such craft vpon cristmasse,*
> *Layking of enterludez, to laze and to syng.*

The mystery is not solved till at the very end the Green Knight confesses to Gawain that he was sent by Morgan le Fay in this magic shape; her conjuring at once reduces the fearfulness of the opening scene, and the end of the tale dissolves the enchantment of the beginning. It restores to the scene in Arthur's hall something of the comic transformation act that a reveller at Kenilworth performed before Queen Elizabeth, when he tore off Arion's head and proclaimed himself to be honest Harry Goldingham come to bid her majesty welcome. The severed head that plays such a large part in Shakespearean drama from *King Henry VI* to *Macbeth* belongs to the tradition of *Sir Gawain and the Grene Knight.*

Several characteristics of the Green Knight remain with the monstrous ominous strangers, Turks or Moors, who appear on the English stages of the sixteenth and seventeenth

century—such as his power of insulting jest, his gigantic, splendid and alarming appearance, his strange galvanic energy, his use of his womenfolk as decoys. The only Christmas disguisings for the Hall which actually survive are those of John Lydgate, where the unhappy, pious child-king Henry VI was saluted by angels descending with the fleur-de-lis, and a dove brought Clovis' golden ampoule for his anointing at Rheims. This was the boy for whom Shakespeare's Henry V had hoped such glory when he wooed Katherine of France:

> Shall not thou and I, between St Denis and St George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard? shall we not? what sayest thou, my fair flower de luce?

But Henry VI was no Gawain. Indeed he was much more like the hen-pecked husbands who presented their petitions to him in the Christmas Mumming at Hertford.

Giants and dwarfs marched together in street pageants; early in the sixteenth century, the grotesque figure of the "drouchis" or dwarf makes a sudden eruption, set down by a whirlwind at the Market Cross of Edinburgh, proclaiming himself Turk, giant and goblin all in one:

Harry, harry, hobbillschowe!
Se quha is cummyn nowe,
Bot I wait nevir howe, — *wait: wot.*
With the quhorle wynd? — *quhorle: whirl*
A Soldan out of Seriand land,
A gyand strang for to stand
That with the strength of my hand
Beres may bynd.
Yit I trowe that I vary,
I am the nakit Blind Harry, — *Blind Harry: a goblin*
That lang has bene in the fary,
Farleis to find. — *farleis: wonders*

After blowing himself out by proclaiming his giant ancestry, and by his shouted claims and monstrous jests drawing a crowd, the "drouchis" reveals himself a poor player, who has come to cry his play. He introduces three fellow-players, demands from among the crowd first a wife and then a drink; those who have enjoyed his "lude" may "skynk first to me the can".

The poor tatterdemalion jester shows plainly through the ranting, roaring lines: William Dunbar, who wrote *The Manere of Crying of ane Playe*, played his own part at the court of James IV of Scots with the same galvanic, demonic energy and bawdy frankness as the great Elizabethan clowns.

Far removed from this boisterous bawdry is the stately civic procession which Dunbar described at the welcome of James IV's Queen, the English Margaret, to the royal burgh of Aberdeen. Burgesses in their caps of gold and velvet gowns presented her with four pageants—the Salutation of the Virgin, the Three Kings, Adam and Eve, followed by secular ancestors, Robert the Bruce and a line of Stuarts. Finally, out tripped four and twenty maidens, playing and singing; they were dressed in green, with hats of white embroidered in gold—the Aberdeen Girls' Choir!

On another May morning, Dunbar brings in a pageant ship, under "saill als quhite as blossom upon spray", and another troupe of lovely ladies in green kirtles, their hair bound with gold thread, who shoot at the Golden Targe of Reason, and take the poet prisoner (2).

Games of this kind produced their own images; these returned to the pageants. More figures acquired emblematic shapes; Fortune or Love might appear as monsters with "two faces in a hood", and a favourite form for the Moral play appears to have been the game of Chess or Cards (3). Among the "four knaves of the pack" the Knave of Clubs was chief, and he took the Vice's part when

Iniquity came in like Hokus Pokus, in a juggler's jerkin, with false skirts, like the Knave of Clubs.

Ben Jonson, *The Staple of News*, Act II, *ad fin.*

Thomas Nashe once played the Varlet of Clubs in a college play. This old tradition is behind the most startling theatrical success of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, Thomas Middleton's *Game at Chess*, which as late as 1624 revived an obsolete model to make a highly contemporary protest against the Spanish marriage proposed for Charles Prince of Wales. Black and white chess men represent Spain and England; at the height of his temptation the White Knight (Charles) is shown, "an altar, and statues, with a song", during which the statues move round the altar in a dance—"all move portentously, the right hand way".

"Checkmate by discovery" follows, consigning all the Black party to perdition; a gaping Hell-mouth receives them as, scrabbling and fighting, they are thrust in "the Bag".

There behold the Bag's mouth, like Hell opens
To take her due, and the lost sons appear
Greedily gaping for increase of fellowship.

3 MARLOWE'S TAMBURLAINE

The Reformation involved a general destruction of sacred images in England. The simple mechanisms that jerked the eyes or flexed the joints of wonderworking forms were triumphantly torn out. The Rood of Bromholm was battered to pieces at Paul's Cross, before the great covered pulpit where spectacles of the faith were played. Unfortunate heretics did penance here, bearing a faggot as sign of the doom overhanging them, while in the intervals of a denunciatory sermon, the preacher would come down and lash the offender, who himself must throw his books into the flames.

The first great poetic drama of the English stage is a

pageant of iconoclasm, and of iconclastic ruthlessness. It is a challenge to orthodoxy, culminating in the burning of sacred books. Yet Marlowe's *Tragical Discourses of Tamburlaine the Great* (1587) derives its energies from the tradition it abjures.

A mounted King of the Moors, dressed in red satin and silver paper, led the way in many street processions of the sixteenth century. He rode under a canopy of state, followed by a train of slaves and concubines; he or his followers acted as "whifflers" and cleared the way with their swords.

> Marlowe owes the form of *Tamburlaine* to processional pageants, as the stage directions constantly remind us . . . it is the transmutation of spectacle into words . . . The language of Tamburlaine reaches beyond the resources of pageant inventory—the silver paper, dummy lances and fireworks; reaches towards glorification of earthly sovereignty.
>
> J. P. Brockbank, *Dr Faustus*, pp. 23–4.

He may at times recall the gigantic exploits of Magog, as recounted by Dunbar's "drouchis":

> *He wald apone his tais stand,*
> *And tak the sternis downe with his hand,*
> *And set them in a gold garland*
> *Abone his wifis haire.*

When he puts on armour and takes a curtle axe, the force of this shepherd appears simpler and more archaic than that of common humanity; his elemental form releases the same energy as the Green Knight, shown in a like sardonic wit and calling out a like response, which includes fear and admiration, horror and attraction.

"Threatening the world with high astounding terms", this Challenger storms his way to a throne in a story derived from Pedro Mexia the Sevillian, student of Salamanca, mathematician and cosmographer. These were the new arts by which man was challenging the traditions of his own past. The

gigantic imaginative form of Tamburlaine seems of cosmic proportions, like that of Shakespeare's Antony, whose "reared arm crested the world".

> *Of stature tall and straightly fashioned,*
> *Like his desires, lift upwards and divine . . .*
> *Pale of complexion, wrought in him with passion,*
> *Thirsting with sovereignty and love of arms.*
> *His lofty brows, in folds do figure death,*
> *And in their smoothness, amity and life.*
> *About them hangs a knot of amber hairs,*
> *Wrapped in curls, as fierce Achilles' was,*
> *On which the breath of heaven delights to play,*
> *Making it dance with wanton majesty. . . .* 2.1.461–80

Intervening lines, which seem to describe the head of some extraordinary jewelled image rather than a man, term his eyes "the piercing instruments of sight" whose rolling is the rolling of the heavens. To his enemies, Tamburlaine is a Titan, to be buried under a volcano—a monstrous slave who "ne'er was sprung of human race"; they cannot tell if he be God or Fiend, Spirit or transformed Monster. To his friends, he seems a Jove thrusting down old Saturn. "To wear a crown enchased with pearl and gold" is to be "more glorious than a god"; power resides in the gorgeous and costly metals and stones, and power at once material and symbolic. Marlowe's doctrine of power, like that of his age, was largely a doctrine of sovereignty. In every parish church of the land, a copy of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* displayed the Pope riding in triumph, with kings at his stirrup; then Henry VIII enthroned, and spurning the crown from the head of the Pope, now his abject footstool.

The hard metallic ruthlessness of Tamburlaine as Lord of Death is contrasted with tremulous images of air and fire, which belong to his aspiring mind as Lord of Life. As such, he appears to his love, Zenocrate:

Ah, life and soul, still hover in his breast,
And leave my body senseless as the earth,
Or else unite you to his life and soul,
That I may live and die with Tamburlaine. . . .
As looks the sun through Nilus' flowing stream,
Or when the morning holds him in her arms,
So looks my lordly love, fair Tamburlaine. 3.2.1006–34

A lambent light plays upon him, with the dangerous beauty of that surrounding Faustus' Helena, who is "fairer than the evening air, clad in the beauty of a thousand stars". A delicacy of translucence is reflected from the shadowing wing of the Prince of the Powers of the Air. When the two queens, holding the crowns of their monarchs, bandy words during the combat of Tamburlaine with Bajazeth, they have only the dead, flat brilliance of playing cards; Bajazeth encaged and used as a footstool is but obeying a kind of gravitational destiny, by which Tamburlaine soars as he sinks; he represents the submission of mere flesh and blood, rags of greatness, to the now visionary Sun King in the widening, dazzling luminosity of his ascent. Mere humanity finally expires with Arabia, Zenocrate's earthly betrothed lover.

Then his two followers join with Tamburlaine in the final tableau to crown Zenocrate as Queen of an earthly Heaven. This Coronation of the Virgin by a trinity of love and power has a blasphemous force, which only the old familiar images of the coronation of another Virgin will bring home; but the visual pattern is unmistakable once it has been seen. In a later scene, the reckless burning of Mahomet's scriptures reveals the dark aspects of one who worships

a God full of revenging wrath,
From whom the lightening and the thunder breaks,
Whose scourge I am. . . . Part II, 5.1

Alternations of the dark and bright aspects of Tamburlaine do not provide a fully dramatic figure, only a virtuoso dis-

play for the magnificent voice and presence of Edward Alleyn. His first cry of pain at self-confrontation, the bewildered suffering of an inner conflict, brings him fully to life as a man. He sees the effect of the murder of the Virgins of Damascus upon Zenocrate, after they had vainly come forward with their simple laurel offerings to his black tent. He suffers; but does not melt.

What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then? 5.2.1941

To suffer, yet to surmount feelings which have subdued the gods themselves to shepherds' level, proves that this shepherd is fit to be a king.

The inner conflict of Tamburlaine, roused by the tears of Zenocrate, prefigures that of Faustus:

Angels in their crystal armours fight
A doubtful battle with my tempted thoughts.

Only this once, as the Challenger recalls his shepherd's life for the last time, does he speak in personal accents of wit, tenderness and pain. His relation to Zenocrate reaches its climax in dumb show when "he goes to her and takes her away lovingly by the hand, looking wrathfully on Agydas, and says nothing".

The tableaux of this play, the heraldry of Tamburlaine's white, red and black pavilions, the clash of swords and the sparkle of jewels are incorporated in the poetry, which is still that of proclamation and display. His succession of victories suggest the tournament as much as the theatre.

4 DR FAUSTUS, AND THE JEW OF MALTA

In the prologue to *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe rejected clowning; in *Dr Faustus* he succumbed to it, splendidly. This full drama of guilt and responsibility includes a much wider range of tradition, though not till the final scene does the

realization of his action come to the doomed magician when, like Everyman, but with such different anticipation, he is called to his reckoning. The jests of the clowns, which reflect ironically upon Faustus' powers, are not altogether separate from the tragic story; images of hell-fire and of the torn flesh of victims may emerge from their patter with unexpected menace:

WAGNER: . . . the villain's out of service, and so hungry that I know he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood-raw.
CLOWN: Not so, neither, I had need to have it well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear, I can tell you.
1.4.8–12

Faustus' own tricks vary from those of the common conjuror to those of the eldritch shape-changer; his transformations, though lacking the dramatic depths that glow in the scenes of choice, combine the comic and the horrific, being designed to raise at once a shudder and a guffaw. Benvolio and the knights who cut off Faustus' head, only to find that "Zounds, the devil's alive again" are deceived by the same trick that the Green Knight played on Gawain. On the other hand, the early jests about false legs and false limbs which Faustus sheds so lightly gain a terrible retrospective irony when in the last scenes his scholars find his mangled remains—and it may be that the stage properties were identical.

Oh help us, heaven! see, here are Faustus' limbs
All torn asunder by the hand of death. 5.3.7–8

In his conjuring, Faustus has acted as puppet master, turning the Pope into a kind of property doll, calling up the shadows of Alexander and Helen; now the puppet limbs of the conjuror strew the stage as the devil jerks the strings.

Lucifer's pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins is a popular

medieval show; it had been treated in a poem of William Dunbar with the same eldritch mirth. His "seir bumbard belly hudrouns" skip through fire and jag each other with knives; they are meant to make us laugh, but, as C. S. Lewis observed, we are meant to be laughing at torture. The menaces of the Devil are extended with unnerving jollity in many medieval poems; even Mephistophilis cannot sustain his grand melancholy except with Faustus. The grotesque hobgoblin pranks by which he transforms the clowns to a dog and an ape might come from popular jestbooks, which were filled with a mixture of the horrific and the obscene (4).

The play of *Faustus* offers such a bold intellectual challenge that it demands this compensatory or protective relief—any situation of unusual danger will often call out the impulse to ridicule or laughter. In spite of the orthodox conclusion, the words of Faustus are a defiance to divinity, which once said, cannot be unsaid. The play broke very strong taboos, and the audience went in fear that the devil might materialize upon the stage—stories were current of performances in which one more actor appeared. The audience are involved in the event in a new complex way, and at different levels of response.

His soliloquies, above all the final one, bring Faustus to life through an interior conflict. Good and Bad Angels have disappeared, as he disintegrates into competing and contradictory voices, and his freedom of choice, even of movement, slips away. Caught between the grinding wheels of Nature's clock and the gaping mouth of Hell, the agony of Faustus' self-consciousness in the hour of his dissolution creates a new kind of dramatic poetry. Where the imaginative form of Tamburlaine had expanded to fill the whole universe, Faustus, after searching the heavens, and seeking with the giants who warred on Jove to be buried under hills and mountains finds himself faced with a Nature coldly external to himself, impervious to his vulnerable shrinking. The trap closes; his

body becomes a prison from which he longs to escape into some lower form of life:

> *Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis, were that true,*
> *This soul should fly from me, and I be changed*
> *Unto some brutish beast. . . .*

Who is the "me" that is neither body nor soul—that in his last words appeals to them both to dissolve? The new, tormented self that can speak these words is "Faustus, and a man".

When Faustus sold his soul, he obliterated his ability to possess a past, since every action that fell behind him into the past pushed him nearer to his final end; nor could he look at the future, but only at the present. His magic annihilated Space, but his bondage contracted Time; the last hour, as it closes in, shows him only where he is, and where in effect he had been living for four and twenty years. Such a realization was perhaps only possible in the world of the new cosmology, in Galileo's world. The groundlings who paid their penny to see the devil's fireworks got more than their pennyworth.

The Jew of Malta derives from a medieval tradition best seen in *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, where five Jews purchase the Host and conduct upon it a series of experimental tortures. Jonathas, their leader, prays devoutly to "Mahomet" for the great wealth he enjoys—amethysts, beryls, sapphires, rich spices and fruits which he enumerates in a speech that is very close to Barabas' opening. The marvels which result from his experimental stabbing, boiling and baking of the Host (to find why the Christians "believe in a cake") cause his own hand to stick fast to the Host and then to drop off, like Faustus' limbs. The hand and the Host are thrown into a cauldron like that which finally receives Barabas, and which boils with blood; finally, the oven to which it

is consigned bursts asunder and an Image of Christ appears, Who speaks to the Jews, while His wounds trickle blood. After the conversion and baptism of the Jews, the Image is changed into bread again and borne to church.

In the prologue to Marlowe's play, Machiavelli—in Elizabethan eyes a kind of anti-Christ—comes to question more radically than Jonathas's religious verbal magic, "the word spoken with power". It is a heroic speech of defiance.

> *Let them know that I am Machiaval,*
> *And weigh not men and therefore not men's words. . . .*

But Barabas himself, in his defiance of the Christians, sinks from a neutral and sceptical philosophic attitude to one of emotional fury and general hatred. His relationship to the world is entirely through "things"—his wealth; when this is disrupted, he reveals the lack of any affective tie to men. Superb in his energy, he lives in a world of puppets, himself the only image which has come to life.

The old story of the Sacrament is also behind the Shakespearean *Merchant of Venice* (in another version) (5), but Shakespeare's flexibility is much greater even than Marlowe's. Richard III, most Marlovian of his heroes, combines the scepticism of Machiavel with the diabolic sadism of Barabas, and something of Kyd's Revenger. His is the first part in which Shakespeare displayed his special power of synthesis, of uniting very different traditions into a single powerful form. It remains the oldest "live" part to be acted on the stage; but as I have written about it at some length elsewhere, I shall not elaborate upon it further (6).

5 SHAKESPEARE AND THE IMAGE

Richard III is Shakespeare's first and clearest icon—a diabolic one. In his early plays, he often employs at an emotional climax some icon which presents a woeful or

gracious pageant to the spectators, although his flexible style led him rather to other modes.

Richard II, who played so many parts, from the king's to the beggar's, suddenly sees himself transformed to the mechanical figure of a timepiece, as he sits in his last prison hammering out his thoughts. Richard, a character of particularly strong interior life, is the very antithesis of a Marlovian Challenger.

> *I wasted time and now doth time waste me,*
> *For now hath time made me his numbering clock:*
> *My thoughts are minutes: and with sighs they jar*
> *Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,*
> *Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,*
> *Is pointed still in cleansing them from tears.*
> *Now, sir, the hour that tells what hour it is*
> *Are clamourous groans, that strike upon my heart,*
> *Which is the bell; so sighs and tears and groans*
> *Show minutes, times and hours; but my time*
> *Runs posting on, in Bolingbroke's proud joy,*
> *While I stand fooling here, his Jack o' the clock.*
>
> 5.1.50–60

This could not have been written without Faustus; but the actor has become so different from an image, that the state can now be recalled within the poetry as an tragic symbol. As King, Richard had shown a strange mechanical lifelessness, whether in throwing down his warder in the lists at Coventry and giving the signal for a hundred years' bloodshed to begin; or descending in his sunbright armour from the battlements of Flint Castle to the base court. Only after, at his deposition, he has shattered his own image in the glass, can he see himself for what he is, in this strange vision of the clock. And to *see* this image is to transcend it. Ionesco has based a complete play upon these last scenes of Richard II's life—*Exit the King*.

Boy players were often called upon to give the effect of an image; it suited their limited range. In *Titus Andronicus*, the mutilated Lavinia is described in a series of images taken from street pageants—the tree of flourishing and withered leaves, and the conduit with "three issuing spouts" are gruesomely revived emblems from City festivities used to suggest the immobility of this pageanty of woe.

Portia waits the choice of caskets like a figure taken from an old tapestry. Ancient imagery is more violently used in the Player's Speech of *Hamlet*. The terrifying figure of Pyrrhus, all in black, horridly smeared with blood, like some mechanical figure of destruction, or like the red-and-black suited Tamburlaine, stands transfixed over Priam with his sword arrested in mid air. There is in the Fall of Troy, as Harry Levin has finely said "a glaring nightmare of smoke and screams and ruins", but it may owe more than a little to Marlowe's *Tragedy of Dido*, a play in which all the characters move like puppets at the bidding of the gods. This, Marlowe's only play for children, may have been recalled in both the magniloquence of the older style, and its stagey inflexibility, as Hamlet contrasts the actor's emotion with his own.

In the later plays of Shakespeare, images of death are miraculously converted into flesh and blood. In *Pericles* Thaisa, taken from her coffin, "begins to blow into life's flower again"; while within the Chapel where the image of Hermione has been kept "holy, apart", at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina presents Leontes with a "lively mockery" of life. He shrinks at first, feeling "more stone than it", but Perdita, in the authentic spirit of veneration, recovers herself to say:

> *Give me leave,*
> *And do not say 'tis superstition, that*
> *I kneel to implore her blessing.* 5.3.42–3

So, to heavenly music, the mother and queen descends; she is stone no more (7).

Such ceremony found its later form in the discoveries of the Jacobean masque. As the divinity of kings became more doctrinal, the sudden revelation of a genuine royal figure by the opening of a rock or descent from a cloud enhanced this divinity symbolically.

Oberon the Fairy Prince played by Henry Prince of Wales, represented *himself*; it was an imaginative way of sweeping the small courtly audience into his kingdom-to-be. The slight elegant figures of Charles I and his Queen danced in an Arcadian world where Cupid ruled; their masquing was to culminate in the last and most tragic spectacle of the Whitehall stage, Charles's supreme rôle, when

> *the Royal Actor borne*
> *The tragic scaffold might adorn*
> *Whilst round the armed bands*
> *Did clap their bloody hands.*

The great open scene on which Charles perished reassembled a tragic scaffold that had by then passed away. The enclosed theatre of the Hall had long been the setting for drama. Marlowe's plays belong essentially to those early stages which were based on still earlier "game places", or open circles beyond the city walls, whose traditions perhaps went back to the arena. It is to be found today, surviving in the Spanish bullring, where the "lords' room" and "minstrels' gallery" are still to be seen with their pillared roof and shawl-draped balcony placed above the tiers of seats. The theatre of Marlowe shows an archaic simplicity, even compared with the early Shakespeare, reflecting more primitive conditions of acting, which was still close to the street performances of the first part of Elizabeth's reign. The public theatre had been established in London for a little over a decade when Marlowe's Tamburlaine first appeared on the

boards; and it was upon this public theatre that Shakespeare's first plays were also seen. Unlike Marlowe, however, he was able to draw upon another tradition, with finer poetic possibilities; this was the courtly tradition, springing from the ceremonies and "games" of a great household.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

(1) See M. D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (1963), for an account of the Norwich roof bosses. I have given a more iconographical account of Marlowe in *Theology*, vol. *LXVII* (July, August 1964).

(2) Such scenes are connected with the courtly games dealt with in the next chapter. The ship pageant was common in courtly entertainments; see Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages*, Vol. I (1959).

(3) See T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (1958), pp. 63–4. Two faces in a hood were characteristic of the medieval demon (he might also have a face at the belly, or the anus). I have collected about a dozen instances of the playing card figures. The latest appearance of the "four knaves of the pack" is in Jonson's *Fortunate Isles*, 1626.

(4) I have dealt more fully with this aspect of Dr Faustus in "Faustus and the Eldritch Tradition" in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama, in honor of Hardin Craig*, ed. R. Hosley (1962).

(5) See M. D. Anderson, op. cit., p. 202. Two Judges, sent by the Emperor Constantine to search for the True Cross, find a Christian merchant in Antonio's plight and release him by the quibble that Portia uses. To escape the heavy penalty he has incurred, the Jew reveals to Constantine's mother, St Helena, the burial place of the True Cross. The story comes from the *Cursor Mundi*.

(6) See my *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry*, Chapter VIII; also *The Rise of the Common Player*, Chapter V. Compare Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (1958), and A. P. Rossitter, *Angel with Horns* (1961).

(7) I do not think it has been noted that there is a similar statue scene in *The Trial of Chivalry* (an anonymous play of Derby's men, *c.* 1605). The "statue" of Ferdinand on his tomb comes to life when his lady places a ring on his hand, and declares herself his wife.

Chapter Four

THE DREAM VISION FROM CHAUCER TO SHAKESPEARE

I SHAKESPEARE'S COURTLY COMEDY

SHAKESPEARE'S dramatic career began in the popular theatres. The envy of Robert Greene, who attacked "this upstart crow beautified with our feathers", shows that in Marlowe's lifetime he had already made his mark; in comparing him with one of the dumb actors in animal masks, who appeared in shows of detraction and scorn, Greene strove to thrust him down among the lowest kind of entertainer (1). Shakespeare's reply was to publish a gorgeous courtly poem, *Venus and Adonis*, dedicated to a courtly patron, the Earl of Southampton. Perhaps at this time he was actually living in Southampton's house, for plague had closed the theatres and the acting troupes were broken, scattered or fled. He could well have taken to the kind of life that has been depicted for us in the recently discovered autobiography of Whythorne the musician. If so, this might explain how in the plays written round 1592–94, he suddenly develops a new and intimate understanding of the courtly life, with its long tradition of ceremonious games. This gave shape to two comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which were evidently written in the first place for a noble household. One indication of this may be found in the exceptionally large number of boys' parts—six in *Love's Labour's Lost* and about a dozen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. No acting company could have filled them; Shakespeare was evidently free to draw upon the pages or choristers of a great household.

Still more noticable, however, is the enclosed privacy of

the royal park, the atmosphere of intimate jest in *Love's Labour's Lost.* The messenger of death who closes the play bears a sharp reminder of what might have been happening beyond the gates of some rural seat in Hampshire, in 1593 or 1594; at the end, Berowne goes out to jest in a hospital as penance for his vow against love.

Such an ending would have been comprehensible to Chaucer, and the shaping spirit of these two plays—so different from the pallid courtship of an earlier work, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*—derived from Chaucer's tradition. The outward form had changed, but the audience and their relation to the poetry was not so different. Chaucer used the dream vision to separate the "performance" of poetry from ordinary living; in drama the play within the play gives a similar perspective, and releases the audience, as participants, from the limitations of everyday existence.

2 CHAUCER'S DREAM POETRY

In Richard II's time, the court settled down in the neighbourhood of London; Chaucer, who was a Londoner by birth, derived his intimate rapport with the court as its Master of Ceremonies from having spent his youth in royal service. His verses were spoken on behalf of his audience, and projected an ideal version of the life they led; each was assigned a part in the "play". Crowded together in the hall and solar, courtiers needed such a protective ritual, if personal relations were to develop in utter absence of privacy. The convention of the dream vision lent psychic distance; in poetry "dreams" provide a way of introducing "games"—of playing with reality. A variety of interpretations would always be permitted; and while the lord or lady to whom the poet made his offering would hold the subtlest clues, all could participate, for an "example" of love behaviour was always an "example" of some general truth, and not a code message.

Poetry, as already remarked, was not only experience but performance.

In *The House of Fame* Chaucer explicitly discusses the nature of dreams as if they represented for him the whole problem of consciousness. The complexity of his material and the variety of his terms make most modern discussions look rather crude. But the controlled involvement of his "dream" or "game" may be shown from his first vision, *The Book of the Duchess.*

Chaucer and his wife were both entered in the household of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster; this elegy was offered to her husband, John of Gaunt, when she died at the age of twenty-nine. The form is unexpected. Instead of prolonged tragic lament, or heavy didactic complaint, Chaucer celebrates lost happiness in a delicate May morning vision, where, as in a reliquary, the memory of a ten years' marriage is enshrined with all the lightness of gold and jewelled filigree.

The poem opens with someone sleepless with grief. He summons a servant to read—as John of Gaunt might have done; the tale is one of bereavement in marriage, of constancy and sorrow.

> *Farewel, swete, my worldes blisse*
> *I pray God your sorwe lisse:*
> *To litel while our blisse lasteth.*

Sleep and dreams come at last. The Dreamer thinks he wakes in a splendid chamber painted with scenes from the *Romaunt of the Rose*—that vision of the Earthly Paradise of lovers, the happy garden from which half of human existence was excluded—the old, the sorrowful, the poor were all banished outside the walls.

Such was to be the enclosed garden or park of *Love's Labour's Lost*, where at the end the dark figure of mourning was to penetrate—Marcadé, messenger of death.

Chaucer's dreamer, entering the park, meets much earlier the figure of Sorrow, in the person of the Black Knight. His first words tell the whole secret, as the Dreamer overhears them:

my lady brighte
which I have loved with all my might
Is fro me deed and is agoon.

Yet the unfolding of the story begins at a high level of reticence and artifice—this information is for the audience only. To the Dreamer the Black Knight will only say that at a game of Chess against Fortune, the mummer with the monster's head, he has lost his Queen. To explain why he is so stifled with melancholy that "I am sorwe and sorwe ys I", the Black Knight recounts the whole story of his service of love.

This leads into a long description of the White Lady—no mere catalogue of her features, as in the French original, but an evocation of her gaiety, sparkle, tenderness. He describes her in a simile which Shakespeare was to put into the mouth of Romeo.

She was lyk to torch bryght,
That every man may take of lyght
Ynogh and it hath never the less (2).

In the delightful interplay of a comedy of love, the Knight's feelings evoke a sceptical protest. "I believe you," says the Dreamer, "you thought her the most beautiful lady in the world, and so would anyone who looked with your eyes." "With mine?" cries the Knight. "Why, everyone thought so; even if they had not, I would have loved her, for I was constrained to it—no, no, what nonsense, I wanted to do it, but I had no choice because of her great virtues, which equalled those of Penelope or Lucrece." When at last he won her, their perfect happiness made each day a bridal:

Our joye was ever yliche ynewe:
Our hertes were so even a payre
That nevere was there noon contrayre
To that other for no woo.

In a blankness which his own love-mazedness may explain (3), the Dreamer puts the blundering intolerable question:

Sir, quod I, where is she now?

The Black Knight cries out sharply "Now?", relapses into his former stony immobility, and finally achieves his curt revelation:

She ys ded.—Nay—Yis, be my trouthe.—
Is that youre los? By God, hyt ys routhe.

With this awestruck, helpless exclamation the game stops, the Knight turns towards his castle, the clock strikes twelve and the Dreamer wakes.

The paradox of consoling grief by an aery love vision would be striking to the first audience as wearing white at a funeral, or playing love songs for a requiem. Its fantasy and apparent inconsequence were well designed to dissolve the stony rigidity of grief.

Each of Chaucer's later love visions has its own quality; *The Parlement of Foules* moves from a grand opening—Scipio's vision of the universe—to the Earthly Paradise, to the contrasted courts of Venus and Nature; and finally to the mating of the birds on St Valentine's Day, whose delicate piping song closes the long *decrescendo*. Yet here, again, is a paradox; the chief lovers, like Shakespeare's, do not pair. Given a free choice (which royalty might hope for only in a dream) the Princess hesitates, clinging to Nature even if it means a scolding or a beating, and asks for a year to make up her mind. This girlish recoil, in subtly satisfying anticlimax, acknowledges the feminine point of view; it does not need a comparison of the closing rondel and the owl and cuckoo songs to

reveal that the author of *Love's Labour's Lost* had read *The Parlement of Foules.*

The kingdom of the birds is exactly parallel to human society, with its soldiers, kings, counsellors, robbers and peasants. The noisy court proceedings—controlled by Nature's peremptory "Hold your tongues there!"—introduce a great variety of lovers, each defined by his speech, from the modest eloquence of the royal eagle, the bluff soldierly oaths of his first rival and the clerkly legal distinctions of the second, down to the rowdy cries of the proletarian ducks and cuckoos.

Chaucer supplied his royal patrons with a form of ceremonious game in which he himself might play a part. After the prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, where he is condemned for heresy against love, and enjoined the penance of writing only of good women and of faithless men, he contrives to end a particularly tragic tale with

Trusteth, as in love, no man but me.

The bookish and needy writers who succeeded him betray their insecurity by straining after pomp or instruction or by exploiting the jester's privilege of bawdy familiarity. Lydgate is stately and stiff; Dunbar reduced the dream vision to allegorical compliment or pageantry, while also writing burlesque tournaments of the tailors and shoemakers—a battle of the slop-pails.

Tales of adventure and chivalry, such as the story of Chaucer's young Squire in *The Canterbury Tales*, offer instead of the ordered dream vision an unfettered day-dream and these were a popular form of entertainment up to the seventeenth century. Launcefal or Gawain is rewarded with an enchanted princess and a fairy kingdom. Or else he undergoes strange ordeals, overcoming giants, Saracens, and etayns, the range of conquest being quite unchecked by any ironic queries. Often the hero begins as an unknown, simple countryman, who turns out in the end to be of royal birth.

To judge from the titles of lost early plays, this kind of story, made into a play of adventures, was popular with everyone. Throughout the sixteenth century, games, shows and academic morals that all somehow contrived to involve the audience, were preparing the way for the great drama to come; they ranged from courtly games of the Flower and the Leaf and the Holly and the Ivy to the village "skimmity ride". Compliment to the Chief Spectator, or else a glancing shaft of malice at some general enemy, was expected. To "shadow" contemporary events was so much to be expected that "Shadow" was used later as the surname for an actor. Even in Shakespeare's days, there was constant need to reassure the audience that particular persons were not being "touched".

The possibilities were uncertain, and the situation confused, because the language of these dramas is clumsy. To evolve a proper dramatic relation, the poet had to be clear what he was doing—as Chaucer had been. I have indicated some of the stages of this development in a previous book, *The Rise of the Common Player*, and shall not return to it now. When Shakespeare looked back historically across the troubles of the fifteenth century to the formal and elegant beauty of the court of Richard II, he indicated the nature of his own poetic inheritance. The fair garden, with Richard as "that sweet lovely rose", the high point of late medieval art in England, was separated from Shakespeare by a dreary waste; in which, here and there, some sturdy tale of Arthur or Gawain, with its simple appeal to the championship of a national cause, suggested what the theme of national unity might become in more skilful hands.

3 GEORGE PEELE

A Londoner, son of a pageant writer, George Peele united the broken shards of many traditions into simple dramatic

forms. He belonged to a generation earlier than Marlowe or Shakespeare, for he was at Oxford when they were in petty school. His versatility ranged from *The Arraignement of Paris*, a dramatic courtly game, to a dream vision of the House of Fame for a Garter feast. City pageants were his speciality.

The crude violence of his worst plays reflect the debased tradition of popular romance; yet in one play Peele reached true imaginative form, weaving together fairy tales and sequences derived from the players' repertoire. The device of the play within a play gave him finally the dramatic equivalent of the Dream Vision's psychic depth. The Induction to *The Old Wives' Tale* shows three servants of a noble lord, whose names proclaim them to be players, seeking the creature comforts of fire, food and sleep in the woodland cottage of Clunch and Madge. Antic goes to bed and to dream off stage, while Frolic and Fantastic sit up with old Madge that they may be "ready . . . extempore" in the morning. Her tale "of the Gyant and the King's daughter and I know not what" comes to life in the telling, and soon old Madge is dreaming out the rest.

The play had been written for the Queen's own players, but survives in a form that it took when, in the time of the plague, they had fallen on evil days and turned country strollers (4). In its mangled state it has the strangely satisfying incompleteness that is found also in *Faustus*; here, once again, is true oral poetry; its lack of formal structure invites the spectators to fill in the gaps. The characters of the main play had all been seen many times before. They need no set action or plot sequence, but have only to display themselves for what they are—the princess "white as snow and red as blood", the enchanter who holds her captive; her two brothers, who wander in search of her; Erestus, the enchanted knight, who, like William of Palerne in the old romance, has been changed into the form of a white bear, and lives at the cross roads in the wood. When the Two Brothers meet him,

he does not need to be told their story, but can ask at once: "Is she fair?"

Some of the incidents belong to other plays of the same company (5), so if any particular character pleased the audience it would be natural for them to demand a little more, and for the actor to fit in another "turn". Juan y Bango, the Spanish braggart, might be summoned back with the cry "Let him roar again"—as a minstrel, after due encouragement, would give another "fitte" of his tale. The play, with no less than twenty-four named parts, some of which are wordless, seems to be built for expansion or contraction in the manner of the Italian commedia dell'arte, where the performers built up a play by selections from their repertoire of jokes and love-scenes. Five miniature sets, which must have been packed away in the property carts of the strollers, were set out in a semicircle, in emblematic representation of the "places". The pageant cars had shrunk, drawn up and stationed themselves upon the scaffold as stylized objects. The old wife's cottage, the magician's cell, the enchanted wood and the enchanted ground with its hillock where characters could be blasted with flames of fire, the well of life from which rose an enchanted head—all allowed the characters to be lightly transported from place to place with the feeling of floating freely that is one of the conditions of a dream. For this medley is held together within the dream-framework till Madge's last words give a rustic awakening:

> When this was done, I took a piece of bread and cheese and came my way, and so shall you have too, before you go, to your breakfast.

The midsummer woodland of Shakespeare's dream play, no less than the improvised properties of his workmen's "tragedy", represent a courtly version of this simple form; the likeness is as plain as the difference. There is no element of

parody in Peele. The dream-like flatness of his dialogue is filled out by the rich sensuous beauty of songs, whose clustered images spread summer pleasure, and carry only by implication the beautiful wantonness of a woman's body.

> *When as the rye reach to the chin,*
> *And chopcherry, chopcherry ripe within,*
> *Strawberries swimming in the cream,*
> *And schoolboys playing in the stream:*
> *Then O, then O, then O, my true love said,*
> *Till that time come again*
> *She could not live a maid.*

It was only some fourteen years or so later that such romance-plays were being looked back upon as too unsophisticated for the stage. In another play-within-the-play, the citizen's wife of Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1608) emulates the simplicity of old Madge; she knows old wives' tales that go back to the days of Gawain and the Green Knight:

> they say the King of Portugal cannot sit at his meat, but the giants and the etayns will come and snatch it from him.

The citizen party have never been to a theatre before, though well acquainted with the Lord Mayor's Show and the May Lords with scarfs and rings. The manners of these citizens are those of a street audience; they chat freely to all around, are constantly interrupting to admonish or advise; call for the actors as readily as they call for beer, and proudly pay to bring in the Waits of Southwark. The climax of adventure for the bold 'prentice, turned Grocer-Errant, is to return and lead the city musters at Mile End. In this play the citizens cannot distinguish play from reality; they break up the comedy which the actors are trying to stage and impose their own; the Grocer and his wife, though deeply involved in the actors' story, cannot have enough of their own

'prentice. Their impatience when he leaves the stage is vehement, for he is *their* performer in their "game"; his dying speech leaves him still very much alive, but his mistress has the last word in the comedy.

4 JOHN LYLY

Such was the popular tradition, as seen through the amused parody of a "little theatre" group in the early years of King James. The original "little theatre" group was a courtly one, and in the plays of John Lyly the Chaucerian tradition of courtly games was given dramatic form. Lyly, whose plays were shown in the 1580s, was given to describing them as "shadows" or "dreams" of the royal court whose dalliance they reflected.

The Queen was invited to imagine herself "in a deep dream" before witnessing *Sapho and Phao*, the play where she appeared in transparent disguise as the beauty who disarmed Cupid; "all is but a poet's dream" would excuse the more dangerous satire of *The Woman in the Moon*. The prologue to *Endimon* begs that "none will apply pastimes because they are fancies"; but even pastime had lost its innocence, since courtship had become a trade. Lyly, like the nobles for whom he designed his offerings, was in search of reward.

Pointed, dexterous and precise in their symmetry of plot and characters, Lyly's plays remain poetry of the surface; their delicate fantasy and airy malice, as played by the diminutive choristers of St Paul's or the Chapel, depended on the immediate occasion. The audience was invited to a collaboration simpler than that which Peele demanded, even if the style of the plays is so much more elaborate; for the tinkling musical box of courtly compliment, though it chimed so sweetly, could play only one tune. Participation did not invite intimacy; it only underlined a certain exclusiveness. The plays deployed in witty manoeuvre for the benefit of

Oxford or Leicester; the sharpness of the wit combats betray underlying tensions that could be felt in the dulcet praise of Elizabeth. Courtly comedy lent itself to competitive display in the direct interest of social climbers; reward was uncertain, and competition ruthless. While the queen was invited to dream of gods and goddesses, the poet was dreaming of the Mastership of the Revels; his tribute, unlike Chaucer's, was not "fre" and the clearest note in his plays is one of controlled frustration (6).

The plays were unified round courtly debates on set themes; the characters were flat and simplified; Cupid, not Venus was the presiding deity—Desire only, not Love herself. Liable at any moment to change their nature, their shape or even their sex, characters do not speak with individual voices; "the mind dances on the tautness of the dialogue . . . theirs is a world in which idleness never bores, flirtation never palls, in which wealth does not oppress, and power exists without responsibility; it is, in short, a world of wish-fulfilment" (7).

Lyly's aim was "to move inward delight, not outward lightness . . . soft smiling, not loud laughing"; he appealed to manners and not to feelings. His plays, which leave open the possibility of various "applications", made an immediate impression of great sharpness, they were perfectly adapted for a particular moment, but that moment was brief. They have the ephemeral quality of the true "games" or "dream"; long before Elizabeth's reign was over, Lyly's particular style had fallen out of fashion and was cast aside while he himself was piteously excusing his "tediousness" and begging the reward which had never come his way.

5 SHAKESPEARE AND *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

Shakespeare's mastery of his art in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is complete and assured. Written in all probability for a noble wedding festivity, it takes up Lyly's theme of

transformation, and his contrasted groups of characters—monarchs, fairies, lovers and rustics. Puck stages his own "fond pageant" of the lovers' metamorphosis with all the airy malice and elegant symmetry that had been Lyly's a decade before; once all have entered the enchanted wood for a "rite of May", the speed of their changes is such that when at last they wake, the actors seem remote "as far off mountains turned into clouds". In the romance of *Huon of Bordeaux*, Oberon ruled a magic wood to the east of the world, and so the spiced Indian air is familiar to Titania; but this wood is filled with English spirits and beasts, small creatures of the wild that the fairies hunt. By day it is the palace wood, part of Theseus' hunting desmesne, and the rustics meet "at the duke's oak". To Shakespeare, it is a Warwickshire woodland by moonlight, its dusk warm with the scent of musk rose and eglantine—a kingdom where spells and charms are laws, where changelings, mermaids and monsters may be met, and where the discords of the mortal world are finally resolved. At first Puck the shapechanger, auditor and actor in the tradesmens' play, scatters and hunts the tragedians, who tumble out of their theatre in panic, to find themselves, as in some Bankside scramble, rifled by the underworld.

> *senseless things begin to do them wrong,*
> *For briars and thorns at their apparel snatch,*
> *Some sleeves, some hats, from yielders all things snatch.* (8)

Like Chaucer's Dreamer, Shakespeare here found his way to an enchanted wood where he was to return again and again, satisfying at once the impulse to retreat and the impulse to explore. This fantastic shelter of dappled boughs, whether called the Forest of Arden, Windsor Forest or a Wood near Milford Haven, became his kingdom of Dream. Here, like Chaucer, he found his own depths, from which new depths were transferred to his own writing. For if it be enquired where is the dialogue in depth that enlivens this

play it is plain that one character and one alone is unmistakably gifted with the full range of human voice and human personality—Bottom the Weaver. His magic encounter with the Queen of the Enchanted Wood, when like Sir Launcefal or Thomas of Ercildoune, he finds himself wooed by a fairy bride, wakes the whole woodland to a full natural life. Once he has donned the ass's head of the mome, he enters the kingdom of the cowslip-pensioners; the blossoms rise, move, nod and curtsey to him; the moths hover, the cobwebs twinkle; a silvery voice whispers:

Out of the wood do not desire to go.

The delicate woodland life of flowers and spirits encroaches upon the bewildered lovers, who dwindle into properties for Puck's pageant. "You puppet, you!" cries Helena, and Hermia retorts "Painted maypole!" while Bottom presents Love's Pageant with its Monster. Nothing could be more ridiculous than the triple incongruity of the ass's head, the tradesman's sturdy insensibility and the fairy's dotage.

But who, it may be asked, is Bottom? A stage-struck artisan, who loves to rant and knows how to "kill a calf" in high style (9); who later finds himself playing before a King and Queen (heaven knows how insufficiently), his play miraculously chosen out of a whole collection of devices (some by very learned men and satirical), which the Master of the Revels holds in readiness for the royal entertainment.

Bottom's dialogue in depth is held with the whole collective spirit of the woodland, though he sleeps in the arms of Titania. It is by contrast with the delicate life of the woodland that Moon and Wall, in their laborious explanations, become doubly absurd (10); behind the harmless roars of the Lion lurks the dangerous form of the shapechanger Puck, "a hog, a headless bear, sometimes a fire", who slips in to speak the epilogue. Contrast between shadow and substance is

further complicated by glimpses of an outer world, where Queen Elizabeth walks in the moonlight beside the western seas, or the chambers of a great household are blessed for a bridal. To the dialogue between Bottom and the Woodland, since a third voice has always been needed for a full exchange, may be added that of Theseus, personification of kindly reason, who rejects belief in "these antic fables and these fairy toys" yet welcomes the poor players:

Our sport shall be to take what they mistake:
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect
Takes it in might, not merit. . . .
The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst no worse, if imagination amend them.

"It must be your imagination then, and not theirs," tartly responds the lady on the dais, in accents by no means unfamiliar to an Elizabethan.

The play must have had its special moment of presentation, but courtly tale—partly and more obviously derived from Lyly, but more deeply from Chaucer (11)—released in Shakespeare his "shaping spirit of imagination" and led him through forms of things unknown into work filled with shapes of common humanity.

As imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy. . . .

The difference between imagination and insensibility is hilariously developed in the "tedious brief scene" of the tradesmen's play, with the players determined to represent everything in a solid form, as if this were a City pageant. The courtiers vouchsafe interested speculation (always

courteously gratified by Bottom) and increasingly vehement encouragement:

Well roared, Lion.
Well run, Thisbe.
Well shone, Moon. Truly, the Moon shines with a good grace.

Against this early naturalism, Puck makes his apology:

If we shadows have offended
Think but this and all is mended
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.

The life of dreams is the life of the imagination; and the direct apprehension of that life, not in conceptual terms but with full realization of its power, takes form when it can be presented dynamically, as Shakespeare does in this play. It is a witness to his own freedom and to his understanding of it. Within a single action, players, poet and spectators are involved; this action reaches from a simple gesture of homage to something imperishable.

The flexibility with which the imagination moves from dream to waking and on to the illusion of the play-within-the-play and then back to the fairy world (as the woodland invades the hall to bless the bridal) is proof of a mastery which could not have grown, though it was richly developed, within the small world of the court. Shakespeare's sojourn within that world may perhaps have lasted from 1592 till 1594, when the theatres reopened after the intermission of the plague time (12). He returned to the world of the public stage and to the great company which then assembled under the leadership of James and Richard Burbage—the Lord Chamberlain's Men. From the rarified, delicate plays in

which his poetry had been perfected and his strong sense of symmetry in action had become welded to the imaginative forms of things unknown, he brought back to the common stages a freedom, a natural sympathy, and a flexibility of style which were essential to the development of his full dramatic form.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

(1) See my article "Beasts and Gods", *Shakespeare Survey*, 16 (1962), for a discussion of the social implications of Greene's attack on Shakespeare and the riposte.

(2) Compare Romeo's "Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" The description of Blanche is of course indebted to Machaut, but Chaucer has completely transformed the borrowing from a simple descriptive catalogue of beauties to a lively image.

(3) There are a number of explanations for this; G. L. Kittredge suggested that the Dreamer is "drawing out" the Knight to cure his melancholy—as Chaucer might have done with John of Gaunt. Or it may be that any remarks merely overheard do not form part of the exchange but are recorded by convention, as it were.

(4) *The Old Wives' Tale* was not published till 1595, after the probable date of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was written for the Queen's Men, the leading troupe of the previous decade.

(5) I have dealt with this and other aspects in "*The Old Wives' Tale;* a play of Enchantment", *English Studies*, October 1962. For the emblematic mode of staging, see Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages* (1963), II (I), pp. 314–19.

(6) See G. H. Hunter, *John Lyly, the Humanist as Courtier*, 1962, pp. 31–5.

(7) Hunter, op. cit., p. 254.

(8) The panic sounds like a transmuted recollection of some theatre scene with the audience like birds "rising and cawing at the gun's report"—the image of the birds recalls the fleeing crowd as seen from the stage.

(9) "My mistress with a Monster is in Love" (2.2.6). The ass's head was a regular mumming disguise. "To kill a calf" was to make a ranting speech—compare Hamlet on Polonius' acting "it was a brute part in him to kill so capital a calf there". Aubrey, hearing this phrase applied to Shakespeare in his youth, took it literally and assumed his father must have been a butcher.

(10) They are not much more absurd than some of the personifications of City pageants—Thames with his Fishes, the Sun. Glynne Wickham describes the "wall" as it was actually used; it was a painted canvas on a stretched frame, and was collapsible ("thus Wall away doth go")—see Wickham, op. cit., p. 212.

(11) The quarrelling lovers and Duke Theseus come from *The Knight's Tale*; the fairy queen and king intervene in human affairs in *The Merchant's Tale*; Pyramus and Thisbe are in *The Legend of Good Women*; the dreamer and the magic wood have several parallels.

(12) Professor Harbage has recently suggested a much earlier date for *Love's Labour's Lost* (*Philological Quarterly*, October 1962) but I cannot agree; nor do I think the sentiments appropriate for a children's troupe. Their limit is better suggested by Marlowe's *Dido*.

Chapter Five

MEN AND WOMEN: SHAKESPEARE AND TRADITION

I TRADITION AND EXPERIMENT

THE public audience who came to Shakespeare's plays were attentive; they "rejoiced much to be at plays" and might soon grow excitable and violent; they had traditional expectations, but were also prepared to be tickled by novelty. We may hear voices from the crowd from time to time in the plays themselves—Francis Feeble the tailor, with "the only man-sized voice in Gloucestershire" or the clown's confidential apology for a defeated amateur actor: "He is a marvellous good neighbour i'faith and a very good bowler—but for Alisaunder, alas, you see how 'tis; a little o'er parted."

The plays incorporated familiar and traditional stories or characters, as they also incorporated proverbs and the phrases of common life, but combined them in unexpected contrast with a fashionable, or literary appeal to the more sophisticated. For each kind of writing, sometimes for single characters, there was an appropriate language, a particular set of metaphors. The themes and images which modern critics have distinguished in Shakespeare's plays should not be opposed to character or plot, for they are its direct symbolic expression.

The medium of drama is "not words but people moving about on a stage using words" and certain rôles attracted poetic words and phrases. The imagery of Revenge tragedy is as easily identified as the typical Revenger's part. It carries the emotional charge, the affect, which is attached to this kind of play; so directing the audience how to respond. Images of hell and night, blood and furies are the medium in which the play is built up. The binding effect of these images works

indirectly and need not be perceived by the audience; though trained rhetoricians would probably notice them.

In this chapter, four examples of Shakespeare's dramatic form will be considered, to show the literary and dramatic traditions which he used, and what he made of them, more especially in the relationships of men and women. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, a popular dramatic tradition is taken up and considerably modified; it is joined to an elegant Italian subplot, and it is sustained by the usual imagery for this kind of play—that of animal taming.

Romeo and Juliet transfers lyric material to dramatic form, but with characteristic Shakespearean power of presenting the mesh or web of human relationships. The depth both of personal and of social interplay depends on the variety of poetry and prose, in which Shakespeare embodies them. *Troilus and Cressida*, written for a small private audience, ironically refashions heroic material, and in particular the great poem of personal love and social enmities, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. *Cymbeline* is a "magical history", with some features of the old romances, and some very fine and intricate detail; it is the first play written for the new theatre at Blackfriars, which offered Shakespeare a different dramatic medium from that of the great open stages.

The first two plays, which imply a strong sympathetic collaboration between actors and audience, have pleased many and pleased long. Only within the present century has the third gained general popularity on the stage. The fourth still remains something of a connoisseur's piece. Originally each of these was rooted in a strong tradition, upon which it provided a variation; such a mixture of tradition and experiment, which both stimulates and reassures an audience, was the basis of Shakespeare's popular appeal, in his own day.

2 THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

England was proverbially known as "hell of horses, purgatory of servants, paradise of women". The highest of all the inferiors to man enjoyed exceptional advantages. In medieval drama, the shrew was often permitted to triumph; this was the oldest and indeed the only native comic rôle for a woman —one exceptionally suitable to be played by a man.

Unlike earlier shrews, Katharine is young and at first unmarried, but the great novelty of her story is the nature of Petruchio, her tamer, and the very special means he employs. High theological argument or a taste of the stick (1) were the usual remedies for the shrew; neither is used here.

Chaucer's Wyf of Bath, first and greatest of the Shrews Triumphant, overcame both these hazards. She claimed to have been the whip and purgatory of five husbands: "welcome the sixte, when that ever he shalle!" The tradesman's widow enjoyed a unique opportunity for independence, riches and social freedom; so that by literary tradition the shrew becomes placed among tradesmen and artisans: the Wyf is a wealthy trader in cloth. Yet after her tremendous manifesto in praise of the sovereignty of women, she tells a charming fairy story in which, once she has been allowed her will, the fairy bride becomes obedient to her knightly husband. The Wyf of Bath is brilliantly inconsistent and inconsequential; this is part of her invulnerable self-assurance.

Simpler paradoxes underly Dunbar's *Twa Mariit Weman and the Wedow*, which opens in a courtly vision of three lovely ladies, seated in an arbour on Midsummer Eve; they turn out to be two dissatisfied wives, and a hypocritical widow, who piously recounts the "legend" of her own life. The courtly vision dissolves, and a series of artful tricks are satirically set out. The basic attitude is a throughly conventional antifeminism. This mock vision might be called the first antiplay!

Mrs Noah, the leading shrew of the mystery plays, evolves from simple boozing and brawling to a notable housewife; in some plays, she is the centre of a gossips' league. Lydgate's *Mumming at Hertford* shows six termagents, whose spouses appeal to Henry VI for a "new statute" enfranchizing husbands. The women in turn appeal to the "old testament" and to the powerful precedent of the Wyf of Bath; the King gives judgment in their favour. (He himself was to come under this statute when he married the masterful Margaret of Anjou.)

Two short plays from the early Tudor stage, *Johan Johan* (*c.* 1533) and *Tom Tyler and his Wife* (*c.* 1560), also show rebellious husbands; Johan, a cuckold, denounces his wife and proclaims his intention of beating her horribly, which directs the audience's attention firmly to his abject but boastful state. Tom Tyler is another meek-hearted man who has married Strife. With her gossips, Sturdy and Tipple, she forms a drinking party, but chases Tom back to work when he ventures to seek a pot of beer. His brave friend Tom Taylor puts on Tyler's coat and attempts to correct her; but Tom Tyler foolishly confesses the trick and gets a final drubbing from Strife, who throughout has exploited him as drudge and provider:

> *What a husband have I, as light as a fly?*
> *I leap and I skip, I carry the whip . . .*
> *I will teach him to know the way to Dunmow,*
> *At board and at bed, I will crack the knave's head.*

This very popular farce is close to ballads and jigs, in which the wife is often beaten into submission. In *The Wife Wrapped in a Wether's Skin*, Robin beats his high-born wife, after he has "disguised" her in a wether's skin; in a more savage version she is beaten insensible and wrapped in the skin of Morell, an old horse. Tom Tyler and Tom Taylor, at the height of their triumph, rejoice in a song which puts a wife among the higher domestic animals:

Blame not Thomas if Tom be sick,
His mare doth prance, his mare doth kick,
She snorts and holds her head so high,
Go tie the Mare, Tomboy, tie the Mare, tie.

In Petruchio's central soliloquy to the audience, where he explains his method of wife-taming, this popular imagery is revived. By starving Kate and keeping her awake, Petruchio is applying the classical method of taming a falcon (or kite). Kate is not to be wrapt in a wether's skin, a more subtle form of the animal tamer's art is called for; but it is animal-taming none the less.

My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,
And till she stoop she must not be full gorged. . . .
. . . to watch her as we watch these kites
That beat and beat and will not be obedient.

It allows him to maintain the pretence that "all is done in reverend care of her"; and he ends with direct and triumphant appeal to the spectators:

He that knows better how to tame a shrew,
Now let him speak; 'tis charity to shew.

Petruchio owes his victory to his eloquence and his natural vigour; the challenge exhilarates him. His provocative display of wit and bawdry furnish his courting plumage. At the beginning, both characters are shown at their least attractive; Kate's speech is vulgar, thick sown with proverbs; she threatens to comb her suitor's noddle with a three legged stool; and is defined as a "devil", "this fiend of hell". The basis of Petruchio's wooing is bluntness, "russet yeas and honest kersey noes". He meets Kate with a teasing shower of contradictory epithets "plain . . . bonny . . . sometimes curst . . . prettiest Kate in Christendom" but ends according to a plan of lofty diplomacy and imagination already confided to the audience:

Hearing thy mildness praised in every town,
Myself am come to woo thee for my wife.

At the marriage he appears as a madman, having assumed the part to which shrews were supposed to reduce their husbands (2). The broken-down horse, the mad attire and wild behaviour, suggest that if she is a devil, he is "a devil, a devil, a very fiend . . . tut, she's a lamb, a dove, a fool to him". Yet all the time he assumes a virtue for her if she has it not; maintains her sweetness, obedience, ignores her threats and tears—or, for those members of the audience who were prepared to look below the farce, he is appealing to the desire to be mastered and cherished which Kate's angry, thwarted, provocative abuse unconsciously betrays. This mastery he asserts immediately after the wedding with a mimic marriage by capture, and an assertion of his legal rights.

I will be master of what is my own,
She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.

All the usual desires of the shrew for feasts, clothes, company are withheld till Kate capitulates and enters Petruchio's private universe, in which "it shall be what o'clock I say it is", in which he decides whether the sun or the moon is shining in the sky.

Petruchio's last demand is a mere flouting of decorum. He wants a kiss in the public street; he gets it. The shrew's rôle is transformed, and the charming young woman whom Petruchio imagined, he has now, like Pygmalion, obtained in the flesh.

Her final oration to the other wives recalls the man's part as breadwinner, protector and temporal lord. The audience has been given a lovers' battle, a war of wits between the two; Katharine is the first shrew to be shown as youthful bride. Her sister, Bianca, who had begun by sweet obedience,

now takes over the shrew's part; while the third bride in the play, being a widow, uses an easy tone of practised insolence.

The Italian subplot in which Bianca's lovers are entangled in a series of mistaken identities, sets off by its flat characters and complicated disguises the depth and simplicity of the main plot. A third level of artifice is given by the Induction, for the whole story is presented as a play within a play. Old Sly's son of Burton Heath, who is caught up into a dream of food, drink and obsequious service through the prank of a young lord, is even presented with a modest obedient "wife"—a page in disguise. After he has been entertained by a troupe of actors, he wakes declaring that he has now learned how to tame his own shrew (3). The question of identity has been worked out at three levels.

The moral of the play would appear to be the old proverb, "Better marry a shrew than a sheep"; all the wryness, sting and satire is taken out of Katharine's rôle. It is well within the compass of a boy player; "she" is on the stage for a remarkably short time, most of which is taken up with listening to Petruchio. This play has always done better on the boards than in the study. Fletcher wrote a sequel to it, *The Woman's Prize or the Tamer Tamed* (1604–10), where Petruchio in old age comes to London for a second wife; the lady, under the leadership of "Colonel Bianca", barricades herself on the wedding night and starts a campaign against husbands. By a series of tricks which include pretending that her husband has caught the plague, shutting him up and depriving him of his goods, and finally, when he shams dead, preaching a sermon on his unmanliness to the "corpse", Maria sufficiently shews the mettle of her pasture. At one point she recalls the animal taming of the earlier play and praises the wild bird, the haggard:

> *(Which is that woman that hath wing and knows it,*
> *Spirit and plume), will make a hundred checks,*
> *To shew her freedom, sail in every air. . . .*

The tanner's wife who leads a regiment of country wives to the battle, invokes the older play, swearing that Maria shall march off with terms of victory:

She shall, Tom Tyler's,
And brave ones too.

The gossips' league is also revived; yet Maria submits in the end, having won her victory. There is a feeling here that the audience are being asked to play old parts and strike old attitudes; the romp is a little too self-conscious; there is too much burlesque in the farce.

In *The Silent Woman* Ben Jonson, himself married to "a shrew but honest", sketches a variety of women in rebellion. There is the low comedy of a shop-keeping termagent, Mistress Otter; the lofty pretensions of the Ladies Collegiate, women of fashion "that live from their husbands; and give entertainment to all the wits and braveries of the time"; and Epicoene herself, the Silent Woman, transformed from modesty to scolding and at last shown up as a boy in disguise. Truewit, the connoisseur of women, delivers a tremendous Character of an Ill Wife; the audience are invited to identify themselves with the Wits, whose view is detached, ironic and merciless. The whole plot turns on Dauphine's stratagem of "marrying" his uncle Morose to a boy; but life and vivacity is stronger in the parts of the cheated, than in that of the cool young cavalier who plays so dexterously with his victim. Morose, the hero-victim, serves as dark antithesis to his nephew; a wit himself, in spite of his defeat he impresses by a massiveness that the young men can not show. Although the conscious identification is with Youth, and against Crabbed Age, yet it is in Dauphine's saturnine foe that the deeper, more Shakespearean complexity of character is to be found.

3 ROMEO AND JULIET

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, a traditionally comic rôle was made part of a relationship in depth; this in turn was linked to an ingenious farce whose complexities belonged to the professional traditions of the Italian stage. *Romeo and Juliet* presents what Edwin Muir termed a "universe of two"—the full transcript of "true love acted". This explores something new in feminine psychology—the imaginative realization of the woman's rôle as a positive one. Juliet moves rapidly from bold speech to bold action, while among Petrarchan poets, the woman had remained an object to be wooed, adored, scolded, renounced. For them, masculine fluctuation of mood predominated; the lady remained a remote and glittering Image. So Romeo describes Rosaline, his first love; and his first approach to Juliet is that of a pilgrim to a shrine, but her replies are so gaily turned, in their demure promptness, that Romeo has kissed her twice before they have had time to speak a sonnet between them, when Chaucer's Black Knight took years to win his Blanche.

The family feud deprives Juliet of this conventional reluctance. Their names are enough to tell the pair that all their world is opposed to their love.

> *be but sworn my love,*
> *and I'll no longer be a Capulet.*

The secret marriage that makes her a Montague is both a natural mating and a sacramental union, but it lacks the third essential for a full marriage; it is not a socially acknowleged bond. The lovers' sad presages prove true; society destroys them, and Juliet's grave is proved her marriage bed.

The feud is as instinctive and passionate as their love. "I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee" is Tybalt's comprehensive declaration. From the beginning the lovers are alienated from everyone except the Friar. Even in the orchard, death may

break in, with Capulet retainers. Set apart from the brawling daytime streets, love belongs to the night, where every meeting, except the marriage, takes place; the "universe of two" takes into itself all the beauty of a sleeping Garden of the Rose. The mask of Night protects Juliet, while under the brilliant summer sky with the moon silvering her Eden of apple trees, she seems to Romeo

> *as glorious to the night, being o'er my head*
> *As is a winged messenger of heaven.*

In her epithalamium, she summons Romeo as "a day in night"; at the dawn parting, as the severing clouds part like curtains round the marriage bed, she cries:

> *Then window, let day in, and let life out.*

Nature is with the lovers, though society parts them, until the shadow of the plague and the grave brings into opposition the two fundamental categories of Shakespeare's imagination —love and death (4).

The prologue speak of "star crossed lovers" in "the fearful passage of their death-marked love", evoking images of the plague cross and the plague marks. Behind the lyric beauty, as memory and experience, Shakespeare drew on the audience's recent plague terrors, in the great epidemic of 1592 to 1594. The tragedy is connected to a real disaster in the most natural and most powerful way. In the event, it is not the feud, but the plague that stays the messenger, which actually brings the lovers to death; but before this the physical horrors of the charnel have been vividly realized in the description of Tybalt, yet "green in earth" and "festering in his bloody shroud".

The powerful images of sun and stars work to opposite effect, and enlarge the confines of narrow meeting places— the little orchard of a great town house, the curtained bed chamber, the lowering vault, transformed by Juliet to "a

feasting presence full of light". Yet marriage and burial are also united in metaphor throughout the story. The friar will not have Romeo lay one love in a grave and take out another —a grim picture of plague time. Lady Capulet cries petulently, "I would the fool were married to her grave" and her husband later mourns:

> *Oh, son, the night before thy wedding day*
> *Hath death lain with thy wife.*

The image of death as the rival lover haunts Romeo's sick fancy as he opens the tomb. The dead bridegroom, whom Juliet wakes to find, returns to his bride in many a ballad, from *Clerk Saunders* to Housman's *The True Lover.*

Though the lovers' laments can grow fantastical, when they are together their language reaches a clear ballad-like simplicity; "my husband", "my wife" are their terms of consolation. The strength of their love lies in its consistency and constancy. "Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight", the grim jest with which Romeo announces his resolution to die, takes the form of a promise to his bride.

Between the two there is a continuum of feeling on every level from that of idealized fancy to "the modesty of true love acted". In the world about them it is otherwise. The elegant wooing of Paris and the bluntness of old Capulet's household are far apart. "Green sickness carrion . . . baggage . . . tallow-face" represents the abuse the old man heaps on his child, while the Nurse can anxiously work out what seems to her a reasonable solution—"I think it *best* you married with the County" she says, pondering the interests of her nurseling with due care. Mercutio's vision of Queen Mab and his last ironic jest at his death's wound show how great a range may be achieved within a single short part.

The variety of language in this play, and the variety within individual parts, imply a new dramatic assurance. It could not have been predicted that the author of *Romeo and*

Juliet would develop into the author of *Hamlet*, yet his dramatic imagination, in its characteristically Shakespearean form, is already present in the earlier play.

This variety can be parallelled only in Chaucer. The likelihood that the creator of Angelica the Nurse had learnt from the creator of the Wyf of Bath is not to be measured by the number of traceable parallel passages. Characterization through the voice and accent, characterization in depth, ironic and yet sympathetic, is best realized, before Shakespeare, in *The Canterbury Tales* and not in stage dialogue.

4 TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

Written perhaps half a dozen years later, *Troilus and Cressida* was designed to be read as literature, and not only for the boards of the theatre. It was to serve as "commentary" to human "actions", and it "was never clapperclawed with the palms of the vulgar". The formal debates in camp and citadel show conscious labour and effort; the tone of the play, disturbing and ambiguous, controls and directs the response. Shakespeare may have set out to write a bitter comedy for the Inns of Court; but no play of his can be pigeonholed.

The sack of Troy was in the sixteenth century the highest secular symbol of Disaster, the Great Crash; it was what 1914 was to writers of the 'twenties and 'thirties. Shakespeare had to quarry out the story of the siege from a number of rambling narratives (5); he selected, recombined and rearranged the material with the utmost freedom. For the love story which presents the miniature human version of disaster he went to Chaucer; here his treatment is at once consistent and paradoxical. The high and heroic romance of *Troilus and Criseyde* is in every way deflated: a poetic ideal, Chaucer's own "universe of two", is ironically distorted and defaced (6). Compression and inversion direct Shakespeare's use of Chaucer. Each of Chaucer's five books is represented by one

or two scenes in Shakespeare, the division between Chaucer's books corresponding roughly to the division between Shakespeare's acts. Chaucer's story is leisurely and protracted: as Shakespeare tells it

> *Injurious Time, now with a robber's haste,*
> *Crams his rich thievery up, he knows not how.* 4.4.44–5

Pandarus and Cressid distort Chaucer's two subtlest creations—it was precisely to the most original parts of Chaucer that Shakespeare turned for his bitterest refashioning. For Chaucer's delicate and subtle fencing between these two, when Pandarus comes to plead ("I shal felen what he meneth, ywis"), there is substituted a brutal and frank exchange, culminating in the open taunt, "You are a Bawd". Cressid's soliloquy in Act I proclaims her simple creed, the art of the coquette raised to a rule of life, while Chaucer's Creseyde will not admit, even to herself, the natural flattery which she feels at the prospect of a royal lover; she is a young widow, sensitive, loath to make any emotional commitment. Though (on Pandarus' word) still a virgin, Shakespeare's Cressid is both wily and raw, and, warm from her first meeting with Troilus, generalizes glibly:

> *Prithee tarry, you men will never tarry,*
> *O foolish Cressid, I might have still held off,*
> *And then you would have tarried.* 4.2.15–17

As Ulysses was to observe, she is a natural "daughter of the game".

Shakespeare's destruction of Pandarus is as thorough as is that of Creseyde. In Shakespeare he gloats with obscene insistence, while in Chaucer he drily mocks the lovers; his jests with his niece on the morning after her surrender to Troilus contrast very neatly the high rhetoric of courtesy in Chaucer, and the low rhetoric of the stews, in Shakespeare.

At corresponding points in the story, both authors address the spectators. Chaucer, at his ending, speaks first to his book

"litel my tragedie", then to his audience, the "yonge fresshe folkes, he or she", then his fellow poets, and finally he appeals to the Trinity in words which he took from Dante's *Paradiso*. The human tragedy, while subsumed into something greater, remains beautiful in itself.

> *Thinketh al nis but a faire,*
> *This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.*

Chaucer's lines might serve for the epitaph of Juliet, "flower that she was, deflowered" by Death. But now Shakespeare chooses to end with a reference to the celebrated brothels of the Bankside owned by the Bishop of Winchester. Pandarus prays those of his Livery in the audience to condole with him:

> *As many as be here of* Pandars *hall,*
> *Your eyes half out, weep out at Pandars fall . . .*
> *Brethren and sisters of the hold-door trade. . . .* 5.10.48–52

It completes his lacerative destruction of Chaucer's vision.

Chaucer's lovers, after their parting in Troy, never meet again; the prisoner Creseyde, caught in the war machine, is battered into submission. She ends so broken that her final pitiful letter shows her incapable even of the consistent lie.

Shakespeare uses the extreme form of shock, of dramatic reversal, where Chaucer dwelt on the pangs of suspense and of ebbing hope. In Shakespeare's tent scene, by a blinding demonstration, the hero is shown the quicksands of the heroine's faith. The irony is pointed by Cressid's resumption of her old arts, in words that echo the earlier scenes; and, in reply to her new lover's "Will you then?", perhaps the savagest line of the play:

> *In faith, I will lo, never trust me else.* 5.2.59

After her maudlin tears over the pledge Troilus had given her, in which she rises to verse at the thought of Troilus' "memorial dainty kisses" to her glove, she veers:

Well, well, 'tis done, 'tis past; and yet it is not.
I will not keep my word. 5.2.97–98

Ulysses, who has read her at a glance, watches half incredulously the despair of Troilus; the gloating of Pandarus is replaced by the savagery of Thersites; three different readings of events are supplied by three different watchers.

Shakespeare's Troilus, like Chaucer's, had had fears; but the suddenness and completeness of this metamorphosis destroys more than his image of Cressid; it destroys his whole world. Chaos is come again; the principle of contradiction no longer works—a thing may be itself and also something other.

If there be rule in unity itself,
This was not she. 5.2.141–2

If the outward and inward ever correspond—if beauty have a soul—this was not she. The varying points of view represented by the three watchers of his betrayal are not further apart than the incompatible fighting images within Troilus.

Within my soul there doth conduce a fight
Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate
Divides more wider than the sky and earth.

The inward strife that breaks up a whole imagined world was to form the basis of greater tragedies to come; for the strength of this play lies in the vision not of the grandeur but of the pettiness of evil; the squalor and meanness and triviality of betrayal, which here enjoy their hour. It is not surprising that *Troilus and Cressida* should enjoy a modern vogue and that Jan Kott should find it most congenial of all Shakespeare's plays. (7)

5 CYMBELINE

Troilus had cried:

Let it not be believed for womanhood!
Think, we had mothers

and when Posthumus is convinced that his constant wife has played him false, his whole world darkens, his own birth taking on the aspect of a betrayal:

> *Is there no way for men to be, but women*
> *Must be half workers? We are all bastards,*
> *And that most venerable man which I*
> *Did call my father was I know not where*
> *When I was stamp'd. Some coiner with his tools*
> *Made me a counterfeit. . . .* 2.5

Posthumus, like Troilus, lives largely in an imaginative relation; the horrors of his too lively fantasy are abruptly stopped when he receives the bloody napkin that is supposed to be a token of Imogen's death; "the idea of her life" (8) returns to him and is reinstated in his mind. He imposes on himself a voluntary penance, and finds himself in prison more fettered by conscience than by the locks upon his limbs:

> *Must I repent,*
> *I cannot do it better than in gyves*
> *Desir'd more than constrained.* 5.4

He offers to the gods his own life, in exchange for the one he took; for it is they to whom it belongs, and who now give it authentic value.

> *For Imogen's dear life take mine; and though*
> *'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life; you coin'd it.*

So in fantasy, at least, he regains her; he is reconciled within himself.

> *O Imogen,*
> *I'll speak to thee in silence.*

As he sleeps, a whole visionary company surrounds him; and Jove himself descends with an oracular message. Only as a prisoner does Posthumus regain his inner freedom. This paradox was to become a central theme of tragedy on the Jacobean and Caroline stage.

The married lovers live separated, with dreams, imaginations, tokens and letters for consolation. Imogen, vulnerable yet resolved in the midst of open trials and secret betrayals, shows a fineness of breeding, a sensitive dignity that relates her to Chaucer's great ladies rather than to the heroines of the Elizabethan stage. The same qualities are found in Hermione and Queen Katherine. This delicacy, like the vivid impulsive imagination of Posthumus, keeps their relationship highly strung.

Yet this relationship is presented as part of an old-fashioned romance, a "magical history" (9) of long-lost children, wicked stepmothers, and sleeping potions. Imogen takes the same kind of drug that Juliet had taken, and wakes to find a dead man beside her; but her tragic dream dissolves in the end. The magical history blends elements of such old wives' tales as might have been gathered by a winter's fire with the sophisticated baroque fashions of the new tragicomedy. As a play, *Cymbeline* is powerful in some places and weak in others; it represents in all probability Shakespeare's first attempt at meeting the conditions of the new indoor theatre at Blackfriars. It alternates vivid passions of rage, grief, jealousy, mourning, with dream-like transitions, as it alternates small closed spaces—bedchamber, cave or prison —with the wide mountainsides of Wales; ancient legendary Britain with modern Italy and classical Rome. Shakespeare, who had an acute sense of history, must have known what he was doing when he made a Machiavellian, "bold Iachimo, Sienna's brother", lead the troops of Augustus Caesar. He was returning to the old form of the medley, refashioned after twenty years' experience.

For the majority of Shakespeare's contemporaries, jealousy was a comic emotion, and the jealous man an object of scorn. The rage of Posthumus or of Leontes is shown as an invasion of their natural peace and stability; the outer consequences are averted only by the actions of others. "My life stands in

the level of your dreams," Hermione says. The part which imagination plays in the closest relationships is the controlling principle of the romances.

The first two of our plays put life into familiar models by creating for each a spouse with whom a deep relationship becomes established—for the shrew, as for the Petrarchan lover, a true reciprocity brings into activity new aspects of the traditional figure.

The last two plays show the danger to any such relationship when its imaginative aspect predominates. Though Petruchio's imagination creates the new image for Kate, he had read the situation correctly. Troilus and Posthumus, in very different circumstances, each recovers at heavy cost, from his own error of projecting an imaginative form. Coleridge described "Constancy to an Ideal Object":

> *She is not Thou and only Thou art She . . .*
> *And art thou nothing? Such thou art, as when*
> *The woodsman, winding westward up the glen*
> *At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep track's maze*
> *The viewless snow mist weaves a glittering haze,*
> *Sees full before him, gliding without tread,*
> *An image with a glory round its head:*
> *The enamour'd rustic worships its fair hues,*
> *Nor knows he makes the shadow he pursues.*

Shakespeare seems to have believed in love at first sight. The prompt and complete projection of an ideal image which this involves would come naturally to an easy, fluent, spontaneous artist. The dangers of the process are obvious; Romeo is shown as justified, Troilus as deceived. Posthumus, at the end, finds that his dream is truth; he is embraced by "a piece of tender air"—as Imogen is described by the oracle—that is also flesh and blood.

This is a potentially tragic theme, to which *Troilus and*

Cressida, generally placed immediately before *Hamlet*, served as introduction. At the end of the great tragedies comes *Cymbeline*. Between them stretch Elsinore, Dunsinane, the wild heaths of ancient Britain and the rocky citadel of Cytheria, where Desdemona died.

At Elsinore, the greatest fortress-palace of Northern Europe looks out over the waters of the Sound. Its military strength and Renaissance splendour were well known to English tragedians, who had been welcomed there by a king. Shakespeare must have heard of the great Hall, equally designed for drama or duels—perhaps of the cellerage too, for the triple series of underground defences which surround the fortress were the most modern and formidable military fortifications of the day, capable of holding three thousand troops during the Thirty Years' War.

To set a play in Kronborg Castle was to choose a setting that was at once palace and a prison. The palace and the prison were to provide the scene for many tragedies of the coming age.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

(1) Theology winds up the inferior version *The Taming of A Shrew*, which I take to be a later and debased form. (I have dealt at greater length with these plays in an article in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, Band 94, 1958, pp. 132–50.)

(2) As the Abbess explains to Adriana, the shrewish wife of *The Comedy of Errors*, 5.1. 68–86.

(3) This ending is kept only in *The Taming of A Shrew*. Note that the players have been acting a version of the Wife of Bath's Tale, and that Petruchio also knows this story of the woman's victory (1.2.69).

(4) According to Edward A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare's Imagination* (1963), pp. 100–11.

(5) See Robert K. Presson, *Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida and the Legends of Troy* (Wisconsin, 1953). What follows is condensed from my article, "What Shakespeare did to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, IX, 3; Summer, 1958.

(6) In the sixteenth century, Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* was printed as a sequel to Chaucer's poem. The imagery of disease, so violently used in it, may have influenced Shakespeare. To have encountered so harsh, jarring an ending to the delicacy and complexity of Chaucer's story must have been very bewildering to a sensitive reader unaware of the historic explanation of its presence.

(7) Jan Kott, *Shakespeare notre Contemporain* (1962, Paris)— "Troilus et Cressida surprisants et modernes".

(8) *Much Ado about Nothing*, 4.1. Posthumus finds that the dead Imogen re-instates herself in his imagination; the Friar in *Much Ado* knew likewise that if Hero were thought dead, Claudio would repent even "though he thought his accusation true".

(9) See J. P. Brockbank, "History and Histrionics in *Cymbeline*", *Shakespeare Survey*, II (1958).

Chapter Six

PRISONERS AND POLITICS: THE SOCIAL IMAGE FROM SHAKESPEARE TO DRYDEN

I HAMLET

THE summit of the English dramatic tradition is *Hamlet.* But of such a work, in a survey such as this, there is comparatively little that may be said. It is traditional—the refashioning of an older play. It is original—in the depth, complexity and acuteness of the inner conflict. It has received more criticism than any other play in the language, and the range of interpretations that may be thought valid is very great; for direct identification with Hamlet himself can satisfy a multitude of needs, and he has consequently been seen as all things by all men, from angel to devil.

But there is also great variety of mood and temper in the exceptionally large number of developed minor characters. *Hamlet* contains a whole society of individuals, not a row of nobles or servants, and evolves the hero in relation to them, as well as in the isolation and scepticism of his self-communing.

From:

> *So, gentlemen,*
> *With all my love I do commend me to you*

to the epitaph on a spy:

> *Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!*

Hamlet flashes, consistently inconsistent.

Among other things, the play can be entered upon as a masked duel, a struggle for power, a long fencing match between Hamlet and Claudius, mercurial and saturnine princes. Claudius' first act is to restrain Hamlet to "open

confinement" at his court; Hamlet retaliates by becoming a sort of changeling—he is no longer there, but hidden behind the antic disposition, which is something more than a rôle; how much more, remains his secret. This is the *Hamlet* Kott saw in Cracow in 1956, "le drame du crime politique"; Hamlet is the prisoner of a police system.

In the rage, despair and self-probing of his soliloquies, Hamlet plays many other parts; none, perhaps, is final. The liberating processes set out in Chapter Two are therefore particularly well established in this play; each individual member of the audience is drawn in by the great variety of rôle and mood offered, till with Yeats's Brahmin, he may feel:

I have been a king,
I have been a slave,
Nor is there anything,
Fool, rascal, knave,
That I have not been.

From the mysterious glimpses of the moon upon the ghostly armour of the dead, rising from his prison house, to the mirrored mazes of the players' scene, with Hamlet talking theatre gossip of the hour; from the lyrical reflections of Ophelia's songs and the story of her death, to the final duel, Shakespeare pulls out all the stops. The orchestration is magisterial: an interior drama of great complexity is presented in Hamlet himself; an interior drama of even greater complexity is evoked in the audience.

In some dozen or fourteen years the tragic play had evolved from *Tamburlaine* to *Hamlet*: the primitive drama, now lost, upon which Shakespeare's play is based must have supplied a steady plinth for the experimental form erected upon it. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the earliest of the English Revenge plays to survive, may give some hint of what this could have been. The Revenge play offered the only native tragic performance or poetic "shape"; many poets, as they engaged

themselves in it, bettered their best. *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Webster's *White Devil* and *Duchess of Malfi* not only share some features of plotting and some rôles, but also a common tone of lively but ironic questioning, a dark scepticism, that finds its outward embodiment in images of prison, treacherous revels by torchlight, secret murder, cries of bewilderment and of dereliction—"Must I believe it?" "O, I am lost", or

> *In what a shadow or deep pit of darkness*
> *Doth womanish and fearful mankind live.*

In the original *Spanish Tragedy* as in Shakespearean plays like *Richard III* and *Titus Andronicus*, though the weight of guilt petrifies, an ethical basis of crime and punishment is felt to be secure. Power derives from the gods. Hieronymo the judge, outraged by the actions of a tyrant, turns to revenge, "a kind of wild justice", as Titus, too, turns to seek "Revenge's cave". The chthonic gods, if cruel, are unambiguous; and if the price of an accomplished Revenge is high, it is stoically paid. Justice and kingly sway may be inverted; they are not totally dissolved and abolished. In the later Revenge plays, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* onwards, this fixed ethical framework has disappeared; promptings of ghosts and spirits replace the harsh Senecan edicts, and the struggle for power is a struggle for worldly rule. The "Malcontent", a deprived and intelligent criminal, may assume heroic stature.

Guilt and responsibility also become more diffused. The courage of an isolated, self-questioning hero leads him into strange and dangerous countries of the mind. Madness or imbalance is an integral part of tragic experience in all these plays. In Hamlet as in Lear, a certain depth of insight can be reached only when the surface view of things is broken up and ruined.

Webster's plays, coming some dozen years after *Hamlet*, mark the end of the Revenge tradition. Macabre superstition, omens and curses build up an atmosphere of doom in

which the inner solitude of victims who torment each other creates a suspended, timeless void. Their restlessness of activity has no significance. *L'enfer, c'est les autres.*

2 WEBSTER'S DUCHESS OF MALFI

The questioning, sceptical temper of *Troilus and Cressida* and of *Hamlet* is carried on in the writings of Jacobean dramatists generally, and particularly in those of Webster. Fate and Chance—fixed determinism and random accident—seem to alternate in his plots. The White Devil gains the height of her ambition, marriage with Brachiano, only to lose him, poisoned at his wedding celebration. Ferdinand sends the masque of madmen to reduce his sister to despair; she dies unbroken, and it is he who grows demented.

The internal prison that darkens *Hamlet*—"Oh, God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space were it not that I have bad dreams"—has in *The Duchess of Malfi* become a true prison. The image of the prisoner is charged with particular poignancy for this age; the "absurd", incongruous conjunction of adverse circumstances in Webster could be paralleled in Sartre or Camus. The Revenge action of Webster's play uncoils in a double spiral; the long revenge of the Arragonian princes upon their sister, then Bosola the Malcontent's counter revenge for her murder—which he himself had carried out at the brothers' bidding.

The Duchess and Ferdinand are twins, but her feminine part of the aristocratic recklessness they share ensures only that she and her sober husband become the sort of people that things are done to. The power of society is against her, although the Duchess' marriage is a pitiably small and personal demand for freedom of choice.

A detached curiosity appears in torturer and victim as the ceremony of the Duchess' destruction advances. Like

Richard II in his prison cell, she sees herself as an image or Icon.

What do I look like now?

she asks her maid, who replies:

Like to your picture in the gallery:
A deal of life in shew, but none in practice.

Before capturing her children, Bosola enquires curiously "Can they prattle?" and the Duchess bandies jest for jest about her own grave: "Tell me, of what fashion wilt though make it?" Each minute detail measures tension, by the incongruous power of its effect. When the trap jaws are concealed, the perils and dangers of the world cease to be avoidable, and security hangs on trifles. The Duchess, who gave herself to Antonio under the name of his blind Fortune, says in prison that Fortune has regained her eyesight "to behold my Tragedy". Utter privation confers its own kind of clarity. It is true that in her dungeon, the Duchess curses the "stars", the whole material frame of things

and those three smiling seasons of the year
Into a Russian winter; nay, the world
To its first Chaos

but Bosola, her jailor, the instrument of Fate, imposes an implacable calm:

Look you, the stars shine still.

The Duchess's reply, another bitter jest, implies the contagious nature of a curse: "Oh, but you must remember my curse hath a great way to go". Such curses, the last weapon left to the helpless, invoke the aid of gods against other gods. Indeed, a curse, irrespective of the guilt or the innocence of the individual, may lie in the "royal blood of Arragon and Castile" to which the Duchess and her brothers belong—the physical tie which twinned her with Ferdinand, and which is the only cause of her tragedy.

Damn her, that body of hers,
While that my blood ran pure in't, was more worth
Than that which thou wouldst comfort (call'd a soul)

he cries to Bosola, but this blood, which she has contaminated by a low marriage, carried, as all would know, the curse of the madness which overtook Ferdinand. In her death hour she completely masters her own instinctive revulsions and pardons her brothers:

I have so much obedience in my blood,
I wish it in their veins, to do them good.

A more than natural strength develops:

I am acquainted with sad misery,
As the tanned galley slave is with his oar.

Her misery is *sad* because it is settled and established, because it is adult and mature, and because it is massive and heavy as the physical burden of the oar: but

Necessity makes me suffer constantly,
And custom makes it easy.

She has reached this stage of ultimate calm through torments which take strange and unearthly form—the madmen's charivari, the waxen figures of her husband and children, looking as if they were murdered; the dead man's hand, or Hand of Glory (among the most powerful charms of witches). These the Duchess sums up by recalling the great curse of Deuteronomy, the ominous weight of which makes the weight of the galley oar by comparison light:

The heaven o'er my head seems made of molten brass,
The earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad. 4.2.25–8 (1)

For her guilty brother, the Cardinal, only the shadow of the devil appears as a reflection in the fish ponds as he walks in his garden—"a thing arm'd with a rake, that seems to strike at me".

Omens and witchcraft surround the Duchess in her prison; but her executioner Bosola is a hardened soldier of fortune, who has chosen loyalty to the spy's payroll, crushing down his weak impulses of pity and sympathy. He himself compares the Duchess's imprisonment to animal taming—the chained mastiffs, caged birds, a fly in a trap. It is questionable whether the Duchess or Bosola provide the tragic centre of the play; for in Webster's plays the spectator is offered, in modern manner, alternative points of view. (2) In performance, the part of Bosola can certainly dominate the play. He is bought by the devil's agent as Faustus was, and makes a clear-eyed bargain; but when he is paid with a pardon for having carried out his orders, this unexpected example of principles with which he is perfectly familiar converts him: only, it is too late.

The sardonic, the pitiful and the melodramatic are better mingled in performance of this play than they can be in the reading; for the disjointed brilliance of Webster's style needs to be filled out with stage action. On the other hand, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, which has a much more tight and organized structure, does not succeed in the theatre, because the characters remain too didactic. Only the great central speech of the Revenger, Vindice, carries sufficient depth to evoke a full dramatic response. Somewhat against my will, I have come to accept the evidence that would make this play an early work of Thomas Middleton (3). Its close ironic structure and the control of the parts by the whole cannot be matched on the Elizabethan stage, outside Middleton's and Jonson's plays; the extreme bitterness, the Swiftian disillusion, and the narrow intensity of this darkest of all Elizabethan revenge plays might well represent his early, youthful extemity of horror and disgust; its naïvety that accompanies an intense purity of response might also fit the future author of *The Changeling*.

3 SHAKESPEARE

By any Jacobeans, the tragic hero is liable to be presented within a traditional frame of reference but not from the traditional point of view. Shakespeare's Othello, as a negro, would be expected by the groundlings to show all the villainous characteristics of the stage blackamoor, as developed in the Marlovian plays of Turks and Moors (4); Iago as Machiavel, would be his fellow in crime. The shock of meeting a "Noble Moor" must in itself greatly have stimulated the original audience; there is contemporary evidence how deeply they were fascinated by this play, and it was much imitated by later writers. Led by his too powerful imagination to a strange and appalling ritual act of murder, Othello at the end, like the Duchess of Malfi, reaches a calm beyond suffering; he anticipates and carries out upon himself the judgment of the court. His last act is not a suicide but an execution of that "Turkish" aspect of himself which he identifies with the enemy. It is a deed at once of justice and of expiation.

The inward gaze upon "black and grained spots that will not leave their tinct", which Hamlet taught to Gertrude, comes to Lady Macbeth only in sleep. Then she sees her hands as Macbeth had seen his before the blood had dried. In this tragedy, even innocence must wear an ambiguous face: the hard possibility of political treachery that Malcolm and Macduff explore together (5) is contrasted with the insubstantial witches, who can melt as breath into the wind; with the terror of dreams and of the walking dead with sightless eyes. Life itself becomes "a walking shadow, a poor player". This petitionary term—as in "Your Majesty's Poor Players", the usual form of address—brings for the actor who speaks it and the audience who accept it a strange sense of vertigo, that makes the practised and familiar appeal itself most horrible.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

The immediate dramatic reversal of these lines as spoken on a stage is extraordinary.

The primitive sacrificial levels of *King Lear*, the archaic simplicity of its world, have often proved overwhelming to those who, like Dr Johnson, maintain a difficult control over their own troubled imagination (Dr Johnson could not bear to read the end). In the present age, *King Lear* seems to speak more clearly to our condition than any other of Shakespeare's plays; it is a play that presents suffering of such magnitude as to turn a prison cell into a refuge; last century's strictures upon its theatrical power now sound very remote. The three aspects of inner storm represented by Lear, Poor Tom and the Fool achieve their own harmony and balance in the heath and the night; the lacerative pity of the straw-crowned monarch wandering among the flowers, the grotesque exorcism of the fiend at Dover Cliff are fully comprehensible to a theatre that knows Strindberg, Claudel and Brecht. *King Lear* can now be staged in a bare style where its characteristic form does not appear unusual; it has grown far more accessible than it could naturally have been to the eighteenth or the nineteenth centuries.

King Lear forms an exception to the sceptical, questing, self-critical plays of Jacobean times. There are no contrasting points of view; the effect is massive, unqualified; "a condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything". It presents the struggle for power in terms of natural authority; of inheritance; and of criminal treachery. But the power that Lear surrenders is never really conceived of in political terms; what is shown are the *effects* of power—all that Macbeth summed up as being lost to him:

that which should accompany old age
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

which for Lear are never entirely alienated: he loses the hundred knights, his two daughters, but not all.

4 POLITICAL TRAGEDY AND SOCIAL COMEDY

With *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare returned to the solid world of Rome, which was his usual method in approaching a dilemma. He returns also to a hero singularly lacking in insight. The political manoeuvres to which Coriolanus submits and which trap him in the end, contradict in an obscure way what he is by nature, for good as well as evil. They contradict his ingenuousness as well as his pride. He suffers, from the beginning, an initial imprisonment within a narrow patrician code, that imposes, above all, the taboo on tenderness. Eliot has caught this in his verses on the Triumph:

the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent.
O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast,
Under the palmtree at noon, under the running water
At the still point of the turning world. O hidden.

Virgilia, his "gracious silence" with her dove's eyes "that can make gods foresworn" is the only one who knows this Coriolanus. The wonderful archaic simile with which he goes to banishment—

I go alone
Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen
Makes feared and talked of more than seen—

represents what Coriolanus fears at the centre of his being—a very large, very dangerous, magical, ancient, and imprisoned beast. It is the self which cannot get out. Meanwhile he is trapped, "with cautelous baits and practices".

But, unlike Tamburlaine who does not surrender his

revenge to the pleas of Zenocrate, Coriolanus melts before the pleas of his wife and mother; he who had seemed in his wrath "a god made by some other deity than Nature" proves his humanity when it is challenged, and thereby surrenders his last claim to worldly power.

Chapman's two Byron plays belong to the same year as *Coriolanus* (1607–8), but handle with great boldness an almost contemporary story. The primal energy of the great soldier lifts him above the shame of his treachery, although his intransigence brings him to deserved execution. The King's hard decision that the death sentence must stand is statesmanlike. Yet Byron remains a man to whom mere events are, in a sense, unimportant. His great defiance of his Fate—

> *Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea*
> *Loves t'have his sails fill'd with a lusty wind . . .*

is justified by the pride of his last speech on the scaffold.

Chapman, like Jonson in *Sejanus*, is concerned with the flaw within the moral order, though he focuses the problem in one man, while Jonson deals with a group (6). The political cut and thrust of the rival factions in *Sejanus* distributed crime among all the seekers after power; it is perhaps the most "Machiavellian" of all Jacobean political plays, because the corrupting effects of power are shown in group action, with all the complex risks and subtle shifts of interest traced out. It evokes a questing, uncertain attitude in the spectators, and a criticial approach to *all* the rôles; the social framework is what matters, and not the individuals.

In the seventeenth century, with its growing political incertitudes, tragic drama often reflected a struggle for power; in writers other than Jonson, the hero is isolated, as the one against the many. Political or cameristic plotting was better suited to the small indoor theatres than it had been to the great open stages of early Jacobean times. Glynne Wickham sees an indoor theatre with naturalistic scenery replacing the

open stage with its formal emblematic objects; this coincided with a move away from poetry and towards prose drama. It fitted naturally with a more artificial and limited view of society.

The change was slow, but from about 1608, when the King's Men took over the closed theatre of the Blackfriars, it was inevitable. Red Bull melodrama still flourished, and shares at the Globe Theatre were worth quarrelling about, but gradually the King's Men, who were the most closely dependent on the court of all the companies, concentrated the talent of the time; they were the only company effectively to survive the great closing of the theatres for plague at the end of James's reign. Their later traditions foreshadow those of the Restoration stage; the plays are aimed at small court audiences, the issues grow limited and personal. The social order is no longer questioned; it provides a frame of reference within which action is bounded. The early 1620s are a real dividing line between late Elizabethan and Cavalier plays.

In Middleton, Massinger and Ford, the social assumptions underlying their tragedies are those of a class-structured society. In such a society, individual passions may become incongruous, dislocative, even "Absurd" without being ethically condemned. Social presumptions shield the ignorance of Beatrice Joanna in Middleton's *The Changeling*, as she repulses De Flores:

> *Think but upon the difference that creation*
> *Set 'twixt thy blood and mine and keep thee there—*

as social pressure explains, later, the corruption of Bianca in *Women Beware Women*, followed by that of Leantio. In these plays, human relationships are thwarted by rigid social patterns. In Ford's *The Broken Heart*, the presumption of Ithocles' passion, in daring to love a Princess, is a postulate of the play, and depends on a cult of royalty; any merely

"human" feeling must appear misplaced. The Princess is isolated in the same way as the Spanish Infanta of Corneille's *Le Cid.*

On the other hand, Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* is a play of self deception, a private tragedy of the Pretender; there are none of the hierarchical implications that such a story would have carried in Shakespeare's day. The centre of interest is the riddle of what Perkin believes about himself; it is left a mystery. The "Absurd" passions of Bassanes' jealousy, or Giovanni and Annabella's helpless infatuation with each other, belong to beings ruled by the powers of the "blood"—a state of psychological determinism.

The reverse of this determinism is the utter irresponsibility of social comedy; Fletcher's gay young Wittipols and Mirabels, who spend their lives in pursuit of a fortune, offer a stylish model of blithe and easy living. Even the satire of city comedy at this time bears very little relation to actual social problems of the day: its tricks and its morality grow increasingly artificial.

The personal image has sharpened and drawn apart from the dynamic of the plot—Ben Jonson's "humourous" characters, with their neat definitions, may have speeded up this process. Inner direction of a solitary passion-driven character collides against the random effects of chance. The gods have departed from the plays of Middleton and Ford, Massinger and Shirley, while the human strata have petrified: relations between the characters of the play contract within specific social limits.

The whole process might be compared to the formation of a planetary system. The luminous burning cloud of Marlowe's dramatic poetry condenses and shrinks, particular rôles grow more distinct, then detach themselves, held together only by mutual tension and attraction across a void; shaken down into beads of moisture, then into smaller, denser spheres, they revolve upon themselves. As character be-

comes more personal, society imposes position but no longer supplies a function. By the time the theatres closed for the long interregnum of the Civil War, little of the early Jacobean vitality remained to be destroyed.

5 THE RESTORATION: HEROIC PLAYS

When the theatres re-opened at the Restoration of Charles II, they could draw in equal measure upon the remains of the English tradition, and on the courtiers' experience of France. The French theatre of the seventeenth century, beginning somewhat in the rear of English and Spanish drama, had developed suddenly with the coming of Corneille. *Le Cid* (1637), first of the great plays, set a model of heroic love which Dryden found congenial; *Cinna* (1640–1), the most mature political play of the age, was beyond the range of imitators. Auguste, the hero of this play, who recognizes that the price of sovereignty is not only vigilance, magnanimity and isolation but, if necessary, a choice of evils that will leave the conscience burdened, has to pass beyond despair before he can make his choice to pardon the conspirators. Corneille writes tragedy for a civilized people for whom disorder and political chaos are the ultimate worst thing. Though the *language* was far more mature, politically speaking the audience was no more unified than the English audience: John Lough's book would suggest rather less so. Corneille's heroes are always masters of their fate. The choice can be made and imposed on the self absolutely. "Rentre en toi-même" Auguste admonishes himself in the great scene of decision; and to his enemy:

Apprendes à te connaître et descends en toi-même 5.1

but when the Emperor descends, the vision of an eternal succession of wrongs, in which he has played his part, shuts him into an interior prison.

Mais quoi! toujours du sang, et toujours des supplices! . . .
Meurs, puisqu c'est un mal que tu ne peux guérir:
Meurs enfin, puisqu'il faut ou tout perdre, ou mourir.
La vie est peu de chose. . . . 4.2

The mood is echoed by Dryden from Aurengzebe's dungeon:

When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat;
Yet, fooled with hope, men foster the deceit;
Trust on, and think tomorrow will repay:
Tomorrow's falser than the former day . . .
I'm tired of waiting for this chemic gold
Which fools us young and beggars us when old. 4.1

Upon the "sure foundations of despair" Corneille built his heroic plays with all the assurance of a Cartesian intellectualism (7). Yet the exploits of *Le Cid* depend upon the extreme, the fantastic "point of honour" being maintained; honour is essentially competitive, and "la gloire" demands the impossible as a matter of course; though later

Albe vous a nommé, je ne vous connais plus

brings from Horace's opponent the unanswerable:

Je vous connais encore. 2.3

This extreme simplicity at the centre of the tragic conflict is the best proof of Corneille's mastery. His artifice is justified because it leads to such moments as these. His is drama of situation, not of individual characters; Emilie, for instance, seems almost an embodiment of the violent, feminine, irrational aspects of the conspiracy; she is less a person than an emanation. (She would not be satisfied with a vengeance that was not due to her act.) The extraordinary contest of honour in which Cinna and Emilie compete before Auguste for the primacy in the plot to assassinate him is at once mastered and transformed by his own final intervention; he

doubles the stakes and deflates the artifice of honour at one stroke.

Soyons amis, Cinna. . . .

While Emilie assumes that because she has changed her mind about Auguste, Heaven must do so too.

It was Machiavelli's opinion that the victim of an intended conspiracy might either issue a general pardon or order a general destruction of his enemies; he must not take half measures. Auguste, who has played the subtle game of sounding his counsellors, who waits upon intuition to precipitate the solution where reason cannot choose, dominates by cunning and by flair, as well as magnanimity. He is a figure of heroically accepted guilt.

The solution is no less beautiful for being expected. In attempting to translate Corneille's passionate chess-play of motive, Dryden left several essentials lacking. Nevertheless, his heroic plays establish their own precarious validity, at least in *The Conquest of Granada*; this play unites the Icon and the Dream.

A post-war society of disillusioned Cavaliers, who found that Restoration of the monarch gave them back little of what had been lost in his father's cause, felt a need to believe in the heroic together with an incapacity to do so. They suffered from what Keats described as "the feel of not to feel it"—the absence of what is most passionately desired, yet not believed any longer to exist. In the cynical and venal court which such men of experience as Andrew Marvell contemplated almost with despair (8), only an inflated image could be offered. Almanzor is protected against the possibility of parody, for his language contains within itself the grotesque and self-corrective elements that would anticipate all effects of such a parody. An invincible Champion and Challenger, whose single defection changes the course of battle, Almanzor is at the mercy of his thirst for glory and his heroic love

for Almahide. She in turn is imprisoned within a highly artificial set of rules, or points of honour, which effectually keep the lovers apart throughout ten acts. Towards the end of this protracted wooing Almanzor lurks outside his mistress's chamber:

ALMAHIDE: My light will sure discover those who talk—
Who dares to interrupt my private walk?
ALMANZOR: He who dares love, and for that love must die,
And knowing this, yet dares love on, am I.

The lines were famous and they were mocked; but Almanzor himself, after a short bout of dialectic, declares:

My love's too full of zeal to think of sense.
Be you alike; dull reason hence remove . . .
Love eagerly.

Almahide intrepidly wheels into an ascending spiral of heroic asceticism:

. . . And would you all that secret joy of mind
Which great souls only in great actions find,
All that, for one tumultuous minute lose?

which Almanzor counters:

Love's the best return for flesh and blood.

This can be repulsed only by the lady's final argument—the threat to yield and then to kill herself. Everyone in this play has "great celerity in dying" or indeed in renunciation of any kind.

"All that delirium of the brave" was over for the playwright and his audience, but it could be recovered as a mirage, in this form of extreme artifice. Everything about the play is theatrical, is an acknowledged "game" culminating in the hyperbolical flattery of the epilogue, at the expense of the Jacobean poets:

If love and honour now are higher raised,
'Tis not the poet but the age is praised.
Wit's now arrived to a more high degree:
Our native language more refined and free.
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
In conversation, than those poets writ.

Tragedy was usually punctured by the epilogue, if it had not already been punctured by a satiric subplot. The sudden revival of "martyred" Nell Gwynn at the end of *Tyrannic Love*, repulsing a stage attendant who came to bear her off—

Hold, are you mad, you damned confounded dog?
I am to rise and speak the epilogue!—

is only the most celebrated deflation of violence and grandeur. To disbelieve and yet to crave the heroic produced a strange, transitory form which could exist only by denying what it offered.

Feign then what's by a decent tact believed:
And act that state is only so conceived:
And build an edifice of form
For house where phantoms may keep warm. (9)

The alternative to heroic tragedy was the melting pathos of *All for Love* or *Venice Preserved*, plays in which it is assumed that private virtue and domestic joys are the sole consolation for man in a rapacious and treacherous society. This surrender to sentiment has as its counterpart a crude delight in atrocity.

Complete independence of any social obligation had been the boast of Almanzor; even more finally than Chapman's heroes he owned no obedience beyond himself:

Know that I alone am king of me.
I am as free as Nature first made man
Ere the base laws of servitude began,
When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

If his erratic freedom were not joined with such stringent rules of conduct as makes him resign Almahide, he might indeed be considered a noble savage; but his vengeful swoops are constantly being arrested by some inner power that he does not comprehend and which forces him to follow the highly artificial code of honour that is so fittingly presented in his artificial speeches.

Dryden "improved" Shakespeare into good Restoration theatre by applying "the mechanick beauties". Corneillean symmetry was provided in *Troilus and Cressida*, or *Truth Found too Late*, with its blameless heroine, noble heroes and final tableau:

All the Trojans die upon the place, Troilus last.

Spectacle became an increasing necessity, as language grew more inflated and yet more unequal to tragic statement.

However, in Restoration comedy, the audience could play a verbal game with the lighter fashions and conventions that governed their own behaviour. These plays, addressed to the few who could claim to be Wits, offered an "in-game" at the expense of outsiders. Here, there is once more a clear line of development from the comedy of Jacobean and Caroline times; the repartee is neater, the fop has become a hero, gallantry is sharpened by the presence of actresses, but the patterns of character and action are often taken over and "improved".

In Congreve, the pretty and delicate game of talk itself constitutes the action. Wit here implies both precision and restraint; judgment is displayed in what is *not* said. To toy with feelings, to banter the earnest, to mock the dotard, requires the deliberate withholding of some kinds of response. If "the feel of not to feel it" projected the vast heroic Images of Dryden, it fortified also the elegant assurance of those charming fantasies which were spun out in the last imaginative form of the seventeenth century.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

(1) The Book of Deuteronomy, xxviii, 23, 34. See my article, "Two Notes upon Webster", *Modern Language Review*, xlii, 3; July 1947.

(2) Gunnar Boklund has developed the subject in *The Duchess of Malfi* (Harvard, 1962); and also in his previous book on *The White Devil* (1957).

(3) See George R. Price, "The Authorship and Bibliography of *The Revenger's Tragedy*", *The Library*, third series, vol. xv, 1960, pp. 262–77.

(4) See above, Chapter III. There are about twenty plays based on villainous Moors and Turks, listed in Bang's *Materialien*, before *Mulleasses the Turk*.

(5) See my article "The Sources of *Macbeth*", *Shakespeare Survey*, 4 (1951).

(6) I am indebted here to K. M. Burton, "The Political Tragedies of Chapman and Ben Jonson," *Essays in Criticism*, II, 4: October 1952.

(7) Jacques Maritain's description of Cartesianism as "the sin of angelism" would seem to me to apply to Corneille. But cf. P. J. Yarrow, *Corneille* (1963) Chapter II.

(8) See *Andrew Marvell* (by myself and M. G. Lloyd Thomas), Chapters IV and V.

(9) W. Empson, "This Last Pain", *Poems* (1935) p. 29.

PART THREE

Contemporary Theatre of the Imagination

Chapter Seven

YEATS AND THE REVIVAL

I THE RETURN OF THE POETS

After an interval of two hundred years, the last years of the nineteenth century saw the theatre re-established as an imaginative activity, by the revival of poetic drama upon the boards. Paradoxically, it was to show that, in the theatre, verse is no longer a necessary form for the dramatic imagination. Two lyric poets, Yeats and Eliot, have successively lent their efforts to the revival, which took forms they could not have foreseen. Unlike those earlier poets of the nineteenth century who occasionally took to drama—Byron, Tennyson, Browning—Yeats and Eliot recognized that the language of poetry is but a part of any theatrical communication; at first both began by stressing ritual—stylized movement, non-realistic décor, speaking to drumbeats, the use of dance and song. Neither poet had much affinity with the exuberance and spontaneity of the live theatre, but they believed that this was the one form by which poetry could regain a proper social function, and they turned to the theatre in the service of their art rather than from natural inclination. At first their plays gained only a limited audience; but besides opening the way for other writers, Yeats and Eliot evolved the first coherent theories of poetic drama to be put forward in England since Dryden's day.

To those who object to older poets, "We know so much more than they did," Eliot once retorted: "Precisely, and they are that which we know."

Yeats, whose experiments covered forty years, discovered in the end a highly individual form, which might be called post-dramatic theatre; a theatre in which the individual recognized the evocative power of the play, and opened him-

self to imaginative experience, as distinct from the traffic of the stage. Each member of the audience recognizes the interior drama, the releasing of imagination within. This kind of play had already been developed by Strindberg and Andreyev.

If, in the last decade, the work of both Yeats and Eliot has receded into history, a number of features in the new theatre derive from them. Yeats's Icon of the tramp, the old mad beggar, the outcast, is still in the centre of the scene. And the most important aspect of Eliot's theory was the "concealed lighting" or unperceived radiation of poetic rhythm, in dialogue which at first sounds repetitive, stammering, inarticulate—the demotic common speech of the day. Eliot's theory of verse drama indicated the right direction, but not the right technique. He clung to a certain kind of verse, where the imaginative effects of Beckett or Pinter depend upon powerful "poetic" prose rhythms.

2 YEATS AND THE COMMON DREAM, 1892–1907

Yeats said in 1901:

> There is only one kind of good poetry, for the poetry of the coteries, which presupposes the written tradition, does not differ in kind from the true poetry of the people, which presupposes the unwritten tradition.

It was for this reason that English poetic drama returned to the stage by way of the Irish theatre; the Irish could restore, after two hundred years of reproductive playwriting, the vital pliancy out of which drama springs. They called up the rhythms of a language in which elemental feelings might still be evoked, in words that were quick with life. They learnt also the interplay between poetry and painting, sculpture and the decorative arts which came back to the stage through the French theatre. And they developed a great

common theme, the past and future of Ireland, from an inherited tradition of bardic poetry that reached back to late medieval times (1).

Yeats escaped the risks of a propagandist (thought too early hardened into conviction, and visions dwindled to "the pattern in the carpet"). He realized clearly, at the end of his life, what he had always thought: in 1937 he said:

> I have spent my life in clearing out of poetry every phrase written for the eye, and bringing all back to syntax that is for the ear alone. . . . "Write for the ear," I thought, so that you may be instantly understood as when actor or folk singer stands before an audience. I would have poetry turn its back upon all that modish curiosity, psychology.

In returning to the bardic tradition, he developed elements of old Irish stories; then through his lifelong studies of Eastern and Greek and medieval mythologies moved towards personal Icons which finally he made from his own life and those of his friends; for

> a poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy; he never speaks directly, as to someone at the breakfast table . . . he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete. He is Lear, Romeo, Oedipus . . . he is part of his own phantasmagoria. . . .

This was a slow, lifetime's achievement; it took a lifetime to discover himself, and to discover that the buried self is largely an archaic self.

His earlier psychic explorations, at London with the Golden Dawn, and at Sligo with George Pollexfen and Mary Battle, had prepared Yeats to recognize the underlying levels of communication so essential to the dramatist, and the images which are its vehicles. These images, he learnt, must be reborn for the individual before he can "animate them as experience". From the first, unlike such medievalists as Maeterlinck, Yeats knew the legends in association with the deep

levels of interior life, and not merely as book lore; they were linked with visions, and "the drowning of the dykes between man and man".

> I have never said that I condemn all that is not tradition, that there is a subject matter which has descended like that "deposit" the philosophers speak of. . . . I have received [it] from the generations, part of the compact with my fellow men made in my name before I was born. I cannot break from it, without breaking some part of my own nature, and I think it allied to the wisdom or instinct that guides a migrating bird. . . .
>
> When that is no longer possible we are broken off and separate, some sort of dry faggot, and the time has come to read criticism and talk of our point of view.

Yeats's early poetry of dreamy withdrawal provided an immediate defence against the reductive and simplified scientism of the time; in the service of Ireland he found a cause that eventually led him to drama. "In dreams begin responsibilities." It was Synge who, encouraged by Yeats, brought the poetic speech of the countryside into the complex stage language which he evolved, while Yeats was still writing verse "not quite suitable for anybody except mythological kings and queens".

The innocent courage and hopefulness that in the last years of the nineteenth century sustained their little performances in concert rooms and church halls of Dublin united actors and audience. Later, Yeats was to dismiss his first play as "tapestry", his second as "sentimental" and to confess "the nationalism we called up was romantic and poetical", but only radical innocence could have created the whole live theatrical situation as well as the plays. Eliot's summary is just:

> He cared, I think, more for the theatre as an organ for the expression of the consciousness of a people, than as a means

to his own fame and achievement; and I am convinced that it is only if you serve it in this spirit that you can hope to accomplish anything with it.

Yeats rejected the superficial conventions that passed for naturalism, recognizing, before it became a matter of commonplace, that any "scientific" observation is a reductive abstraction from total experience. He had learnt, as Ibsen and Strindberg had also learnt, that interior images will shape and direct the artist's conceptual thought; that the emergence of this process in words is something more than a code transmission (2). Although their developments were in opposite directions, Yeats and Strindberg both began by recognizing that the old stable life of the ego had disintegrated; both turned for some structure of belief to alchemy and Rosicrucian doctrines. But whereas Strindberg began with images of great violence and moved towards the idyllic, replacing his demon women with such angelic figures as Elena or Kirsten, Yeats moved from dreams to violence. His first play, *The Countess Cathleen*, bestows a Christian halo on the heroine, which is, perhaps, only reflected from her lover's eyes. Christian beliefs were but an ornament and Yeats was surprised when he encountered the dogmatic opposition of the Catholic hierarchy.

The very qualities which released him from contemporary convictions prevented Yeats from becoming a full dramatist. He was absorbed in the transition from one state of being to another—from the literal and material to the enlightened; from the temporal to the eternal; and thus was very slightly engaged in the conflict of mind with mind, or the development of an action with many centres. A lonely and solitary mind, Yeats learnt from other poets, and adopted a cause without being able to establish a strong *rapport* with his audience. "Talk to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage. I am a crowd, I am a lonely man, I am nothing."

The writer's inheritance must always remain much greater

than his achievements; by a study of old masters, Yeats was at last enabled to project himself "reborn as idea"—or to use another of his phrases which has become famous, "to turn all to mask and image and so become a phantom in his own eyes". His plays centred upon the hero, but with all rôles including some reflection of the dramatist himself, so that John Bayley says: "Yeats seems to be trying to achieve negative capability by numbers." The level or state of being of each of his characters is of more importance than their relations to one another; conflict lies within the individual and issues in a single act of choice—Cathleen's surrender to the goetic powers, Mary Bruin's beguilement, Seanchan's death for poetry, or Michael Gillane's for Cathleen ni Houlihan; Forgael and Dectora's scorn of life.

Yeats's early work may be termed bardic rather than dramatic; it introduces the heroic character, and invites unqualified assent. Action is faint, though some of the plays are drawn out for several acts; but Yeats never succeeded except in a one-act play.

Synge produced drama of action; it was perhaps the intoxication of this that caused the famous riots. The phrase about a "drift of chosen females standing in their shifts" might not have offended if the drift of chosen females, Pegeen Mike and the rest, had not been actually standing before the audience. Nowadays even the final scrimmage of *The Playboy* is put on in a decent quiet way that would disturb nobody, but this tragic farce originally presented a mask of violence (like *The Shadow of the Glen*), and the violence should be theatrically presented. In Synge's most formal play, *Riders to the Sea*, the repetitive patterns and brilliant colours of ballad poetry lead up to Maurya's lament for her sons, which is also paradoxically a triumph, since "there's nothing more the sea can do to me". Maurya, like Yeats's characters, has crossed a boundary, and entered a new state of being, no less surely than her drowned sons.

The Wise Man, who is the hero of Yeats's *Hour Glass*, a Faustian story, crosses both boundaries almost simultaneously. Two of the leading Icons of Yeats's plays now appear, in the Fool and the Wise Man; at the end they become identified, because as the Fool says, "We know everything, but we will not speak." The death of the Wise Man, the too-credulous materialist whose eyes were opened by the Angel, marks his irreversible transformation or transfiguration: this is the essential subject of all Yeats's early plays. The Fool lives in the white magic of a natural world—his second sight has no connexion with sanctity or morals—but the Wise Man has to choose submission and annihilation before he is borne away by the masked and gilded Angel. Yeats distinguished four levels of life; the natural level, those of black and white magic, and the level of momentary illumination. Black or white magic is expressed in a world of dream—that of the Fairy Child, or the Demons. The dream that enchanted Yeats himself, as he afterwards said, was

> *Character isolated by a deed*
> *To engross the present and dominate memory.*

This "extremity of act" can transform terror into joy, and substitute, as if by metamorphosis, an immortal Icon for mortal flesh. Death's challenge, if heroically met, affirms the identity of the hero. In ancient battle stories, the hero proclaims aloud his name and those of his ancestors as he advances upon his fate (3).

The single deed which isolates characters in Yeats is the act of death: it "shackles accident and bolts up change".

3 FROM MYTH TO ICON, 1913–26

Such metamorphosis renounces the fluid play of events in natural sequence. Yeats himself also came to the end of his

natural *rapport* with the Irish audience, when they rejected Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* because he had violated their verbal taboos. The uproar that greeted this play exposed the utter lack of flexibility in their imagination; this seems to have broken Yeats's dramatic impulse, for after 1907 he did not compose any new dramas, but stammeringly reworked over the whole problem of the theatre for ten years, in shaping and reshaping old plays. The many versions of *The Green Helmet*, and the long struggle with *The Player Queen*, witness to this disturbance; so does the violent imagery of his epigram *On those that Hated "The Playboy of the Western World"*:

> *Once when midnight smote the air,*
> *Eunuchs ran through Hell and met*
> *On every crowded street to stare*
> *Upon great Juan riding by:*
> *Even like these to rail and sweat*
> *Staring upon his sinewy thigh.*

From Ezra Pound, with whom he lived in 1913-14, Yeats learned the assumption of a Mask, or many Masks, as the guarantee of honesty. "If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves." Such tensions or vacillations as that between the acceptance and the mockery of old Irish legend led to a search for new and stronger images—the stony faces of the Magi, images of dead poets, or dead friends (Mabel Beardsley and Robert Gregory). In the poem "Wisdom" it is ironically proclaimed that true faith is found when "painted panel, statuary" amend the tale of "some peasant gospeller".

Yeats's scepticism deepened after the violence of the Easter Rising in 1916, and all that followed. His refusal to commit himself, either in religion or in politics, was a costly choice; but only in the accepted tensions of his "antinomies" could

he impose the secret discipline of his vocation. His continued exploration of the occult is as far removed from credulity as might be imagined; it was a personal affair, not a matter of affiliation.

He first turned away from his early style in *The Green Helmet*, which retells an Irish version of *Sir Gawain and the Grene Knight*. A grotesque comedy, full of loud quarrelsome women, boasting men, cat-headed monsters out of the sea, it presents a stylish disengaged hero, Cuchulain, who was to be the centre of many later plays. In the first version, he offers his own neck to the blow in place of a coward, as a noble sacrifice for Ireland:

RED MAN: If my debt is not paid, no peace shall come to Ireland, and Ireland shall lie weak before her enemies. But if my debt is paid, there shall be peace.

CUCHULAIN: The quarrels of Ireland shall end. What is one man's life? I will pay the debt with my own head. Do not cry out, Emer, for if I were not myself, if I were not Cuchulain, one of those that God has made reckless, the women of Ireland had not loved me, and you had not held your head so high. What do you wait for, old man? Come, raise up your sword.

RED MAN: I will not harm you, Cuchulain. I am the guardian of this land, and age after age I come up out of the sea to try the men of Ireland. I give you the championship because you are without fear, and you shall win many battles with laughing lips, and endure wounding and betrayal without bitterness of heart. . . .

(*The Golden Helmet*, 1908) *

The later version permits no such dignity to the grotesque sea demon and cuts the patriotic appeal. Cuchulain has grown more Byronic; the mockery of his tumbling verses uses something like Synge's "mask of violence" for the defence of Synge's cause:

* The title of the first version of *The Green Helmet*

CUCHULAIN: He played and paid with his head, and it's
right that we pay him back,
And give him more than he gave, for he comes in here as a
guest.
So I will give him my head (Emer begins to keen). Little
wife, little wife, be at rest. . . .
Bear children and sweep the house. Wail, but keep from
the road.
Quick to your work, old Radish, you will fade when the
cocks have crowed.
RED MAN: I have not come for your head, I'm the Rector of
this land,
And with my spitting catheads, my frenzied moon-bred
band,
Age after age, I sift it, and choose for my championship
The man who hits my fancy. And I choose the laughing lip
That shall not turn from laughing, whatever rise or fall:
The heart that grows no bitterer, although betrayed by all:
The hand that loves to scatter; the life like a gambler's
throw. . . .

(*The Green Helmet*, 1910)

This is an early example of how Yeats refashioned his Icons. Gradually the main figures of his imaginative life became vivid, precise, original, by what Eliot termed "the purging out of ornament"; the course of improvement is "towards a greater and greater starkness" and towards an increasing irony in shaping the internal myth. In the gap of time between his first and his second group of plays, [which was written between 1916 and 1926] Yeats struggled with his own doubts, as much as with the theatre. "I wanted a dance, because where there are no words, there is less to spoil." Yet the unspoken climax is validated and defined by the speech which builds up to it, as when Deirdre in the hour of her betrayal sits down to the chessboard, or when, in *Resurrection*, the silent Figure crosses the floor of the Upper Room.

From the traditions of the Japanese Noh plays Yeats, by

free selection, established a personal form which would reserve his plays for initiates only (4). In medieval times, ritual had calmed a turbulent, yeasty mob, or ceremony shaped into semblance of order the feast and the dance. For Yeats, ritual and ceremony were a means of keeping apart

> against a pushing world. . . . The arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate, we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism and loud noise.
>
> (*On Certain Noble Plays of Japan*)

Yugen, the deep interior harmony that lies beyond ordinary life, is the essence of Noh.

I have no thought—my mind has been swept bare, says the Wise Man after his illumination; and after his life's glass has run and the Fool has given the white butterfly which is his soul to the Angel's keeping, he himself returns to his humbler insights:

I hear the wind ablow
I hear the grass agrow,
And all that I know, I know.
But I will not speak, I will run away.

The Fool, who meets Angels on the hills every day, the Wise Man whose thoughts have run

Into some cloudy thunderous spring
That is its mountain source

share the illumination that is incommunicable to the rational mind in its own terms.

Yeats's plays for dancers, intended for an audience about fifty in number, assume that the high state of tragedy is gained

by withdrawal and not by sympathy. No longer does he portray the crossing of a boundary between the visible and the invisible world because these now interpenetrate each other. He assumes the constant presence of the supernatural—the Woman of the Sidhe, the voice of Swift, the dead bride and galloping horse of *Purgatory* dominate the stage. The masks or Idols of "the superhuman" must be accepted, and for all plays except the last, this demands a measure of esoteric knowledge as well as natural imagination. In Noh plays, the central act is by tradition a struggle with a ghost or spirit; Yeats's spirits too are no longer "mild, proud shadows" but the predatory hawk, the sea-demon. The great figures of Conchubar the ruler and Cuchulain the hero were radically remade. At the hawk's well, the young Cuchulain first meets the feminine demon; afterwards the menacing Fand comes out of the sea and in his last hour, Cuchulain meets the Morrigu, the woman headed like a crow. The evil supernatural has taken a feminine form again; the lyric of another mythologist might be taken as summing up the mood of the Plays for Dancers:

Her strong enchantments failing,
Her towers of fear in wrack,
Her limbecks dried of poison,
And the sword at her neck,

The Queen of Air and Darkness
Begins to shrill and cry,
"O young man, O my slayer,
Tomorrow you shall die."

"O Queen of air and darkness,
I think 'tis true you say,
And I shall die tomorrow,
But you will die today."

In *Last Poems*, the bronze head of Maud Gonne, who had first formed the image of the Countess Cathleen, then of Cath-

leen ni Houlihan, then Helen of Troy, becomes that of a Sphinx:

> *supernatural,*
> *As though a sterner eye looked through her eye,*
> *On this foul world in its decline and fall;*
> *On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,*
> *Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave,—*
> *And wondered what was left for massacre to save.*

4 THE REVIVAL OF THE ICON, 1935–39

In Yeats's last play, Cuchulain surmounts the ignominy of death at the hands of a blind beggar man who, when the chieftain is wounded and bound to a pillar, cuts his throat for a reward of twelve pennies. From the long perspective of old age, Yeats looked back at the story of Ireland and himself, and having learnt the bitterness both of victory and defeat, no longer dealt in battles or dreams, but a single ritual murder. The death of Cuchulain is ironically contrasted in prologue and epilogue with the squalor of the present time; but, as in *The Words upon the Window Pane* and *Purgatory*, the fable of an old age of humiliation is enclosed in a wider story; the blood, nerve and impulse of helpless and ignorant life encloses a Godlike power. In *A Full Moon in March* it is the ritual murder of the poet that puts song into his dead lips.

In *Purgatory*, a monodrama, the speaker plays back his own life and that of his parents. Action takes place in his own mind and that of his dead mother, issuing in the ritual killing of his son. A great house and family had been destroyed when his mother married a drunken groom whom the hero himself, at the age of sixteen, had killed. Now, a "wretched foul old man" as he watches in the ruins of his burnt-out home the ghostly re-enactment of his own begetting, he kills again—"my father and my son on the same jack-knife"—that pollution may not be passed on. For an instant, the dead tree,

symbol of his family, shines out with cold radiance, but the hoof beats of his father's horse return, for his mother's earth-bound soul cannot be released from its dream of the past.

Thus the re-enactment of "the past which is always present" in the compulsive violence of the ancestral dream revolves upon the double impulse of lust and murder. The dead woman who had followed her fancy, the drunkard whose shadow "like a tired beast" leans on the burnt-out window frame of the house he destroyed are both guilty:

> *he killed the house: to kill a house*
> *When great men grew up, married, died,*
> *I here declare a capital offence.*

The old man's murder of his drunken father in the burning house, like the murder of the son he has begot "upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch", are the violent but necessary consequences of preceding acts; as the rape of Leda sealed the doom of Troy.

> *A shudder in the loins engendered there*
> *The broken wall, the burning roof and tower,*
> *And Agamemnon dead.*
>
> *Leda and the Swan*

. . . . . .

> *The window is dimly lit again.*
> *Do not let him touch you! It is not true*
> *That drunken men cannot beget*
> *And if he touch he must beget*
> *And you must bear his murderer.*
>
> *Purgatory*

Shuttling between the living past and the horror of recogniton ("my wits are out"), the old man, at the moment when his mother passes into the bride sleep, destroys the son of his own begetting and assumes the all-protecting rôle that she, who died in giving birth, had never known. He had lived in

imagination through her pleasure and remorse, as the two ghosts had lain upon the mattress begetting him; now in grotesque metamorphosis of the generations, he sings to the dead boy a heroic lullaby:

Hush a bye, baby, thy father's a knight,
Thy mother a lady, lovely and bright.

The re-animation of the mother in her son does not save her ghost from its penance:

Twice a murderer and all for nothing!
And she must animate that dead night
Not once, but many times.
O God,
Release my mother's soul from its dream!
Mankind can do no more. Appease
The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.

The dramatic perspectives of this play depend on the transformation of one generation into another; it is a play of recognition, not of action; the limits of individual suffering have been reached in the separateness and unity of the mad old man with his ghosts.

"It is myself that I remake," Yeats had protested as justification for the reshaping of his poems. Some raw material for this monodrama can be found in the poem published with it, "Why should not old men be mad?" and in the "Private Thoughts". Like some grand musical finale, Yeats's whole dramatic development is summed up here (5), and in the lineaments of the Old Man can be seen the traces of many earlier masks—the Wise Man learning that wisdom comes of beggary, Synge's Joker who killed his "da": Tom the Lunatic from the poems, where the lit-up ruins of Castle Dargan are recalled again and again. Swift, in *The Words upon the Window Pane*, had said "I have that in my blood which no child must inherit", but here the great house represents the total inheritance of Swift's Ireland, for good and ill; and all is squandered.

That so much has been brought to bear on this brief play may explain its force; in *The Death of Cuchulain*, there is more statement, theory, protest. This hero, killed also by a blind beggar, no longer gives the harper matter for heroic song:

> *An old man looking back on life*
> *Imagines it in scorn.*

"Observed facts do not mean much till I can make them parts of my experience" was among Yeats's last "Private Thoughts"; this was the necessary condition for that "remaking of himself" which prompted his daedal art, and in which he finally grew "expert beyond experience". Yet the final concentration which turns gesture and proclamation into vision must come as a gift.

5 THE INHERITANCE BEQUEATHED

These later plays incorporate so much that is alien, harsh and negative as to become paradoxical. Beauty is now inseparable from terror and violence; scepticism must salt and season all belief. Yeats could mock at his own images—as in *The Circus Animals' Desertion*—and he spoke of the "harsh geometry of *A Vision*"—as "incomplete interpretation"; it was meant only for "my schoolmates", those who would not misunderstand the particular grammar of assent. Religious and political concepts are alike dissolved; Yeats imagined

> A Christ not shut off in history but flowing, concrete, phenomenal . . . that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body

while

> State and Nation are the work of intellect, and when you consider what comes before and after they are . . . not worth the blade of grass God gives for the nest of the linnet.

Yeats said in the preface to *A Vision* that abstract definition is "incidental and temporary" and that "whatsoever is defined is taken out of experience . . . and that spiritual realities especially can be known only in the animation of experience", and finally in *Wheels and Butterflies* that "mythology . . . draws one onward to the unknown".

His strict dramatic form transmitted material that otherwise might remain inaccessible. In early plays, where the divine was mediated through a woman, and death came like the loosening of long hair, the sensuous appeal of the verse was soft and indefinite, the themes were touching and simple. Later, as the images grew murderous or goetic, the transformations more fantastic, the writing became harder and firmer, more condensed; it anticipates the work of later men. The image of the tramp, the beggar or the blind man has become the most potent Icon of the modern stage—in Beckett and Genet, Pinter and Ionesco, the lineaments traced by Yeats maintain their form. Only by living with them throughout a lifetime did the Fool and Blind Man from *On Baile's Strand* become individualized; still as Yeats said: "I seek an image of the modern mind's discovering itself."

Yeats's contribution to modern drama is therefore not to be reckoned in terms of the number of performances which his plays obtain. In the first period of his play-writing, roughly from 1892 to 1908, his exertions also provided the stage with other poets and drew those who would support it to help him. In his second period, roughly from 1916 to 1926, he provided a poetic approach upon which other writers had advanced, while himself withdrawing from the public stage. This was inevitable, since the interior drama which he projected was without a basis in popular acceptance or understanding. Nowadays every youth who has read his Fromm is "enlightened" on what Yeats "really" meant by the symbol of the hawk's well—by indulging all those projective fantasies of which the poet so painfully divested himself. Yeats's poems

of experience, being the hard-won searchings of his "dark" self, will repel those who cannot accept the brutal and archaic levels within their own being, or who expect to find in another's symbolic forms the exact reflexion of their own. As he said:

> The drama has need of cities that it may find men in sufficient numbers. . . . It has one day when the emotions of cities still remember the emotions of sailors and husbandmen; it has another day, now beginning, when thought and scholarship discover their desire.

Yeats appeals to a deep of the mind and not to the level of simple routine; in his very last plays, by means of those Icons he evolved as personal refashioning of traditional images, he speaks not *of* the Dream but *to* the Dream that everyone carries within. Not until their inner Dream has been partially subjected to insight and control, can his statements convey very much to the Dreamer.

Eliot praised the final plays of Yeats because they solved the problem of speech in verse; but Yeats gave much more than a speech rhythm. He achieved the rhythm as a consequence of his separation of the personae of his inward drama, who had been animated from icons to images that were dynamic and "self-begotten". The "conversational" tone of his later poetry—it is really not conversational at all—the return of natural voice to his verse, constitutes proof that he had projected his inner drama, into the common tongue.

For each language, and for each generation, such elements must be formed afresh. Compared with the work of Ibsen or of Strindberg, Yeats's achievement may look limited; but without the Irish dramatic movement, imaginative drama would not have returned to the English stage. And Yeats was at the centre of that recovery of a great area for poetry and for the work of the imagination—this was a great public service to the language, which Yeats himself proffered as his best

claim to the Nobel prize for literature, wishing only that Synge and Lady Gregory could have shared it with him.

The first phase of Yeats's dramatic career gave service to the good estate of poetry in the modern world. The second phase, not a matter of the public stages, supplied later writers with themes. "Yeats had nothing and we have had Yeats." The influence of his work is out of all proportion to its scale. The theatre of Samuel Beckett, in particular, is deeply endebted to Yeats's *Purgatory*, without which *Waiting for Godot* and the dramas which followed would hardly have been conceivable.

A parallel with Marlowe is not entirely absurd. Both were poets of soaring imagination whose work is concentrated and yet of great apparent simplicity; who carve out monolithic heroic figures with a powerful mixture of high idealism and mordant ironic disclaimer; who admit a dark streak of violence, from goetic powers. That Marlowe's work was crowded into a few years only and Yeats's spread over a long lifetime does not prevent it being true of the one as of the other, that a great personal achievement was also the foundation for great work to follow. Each of these poets was founder of a drama quite different from his own.

Yet, the likeness breaks down completely if Marlowe and Yeats are seen in terms of the stage. The one achieved dazzling popularity with the common people as well as the poets, and wrote for the great open "game place" or for a small courtly group with equal ease. Yeats had only one or two public successes, and the Old Man who speaks the prologue to *The Death of Cuchulain* wanted an audience of fifty or a hundred. "If there are more than a hundred I won't be able to escape people who are educating themselves out of Book Societies and the like, sciolists all, pickpockets and opinionated bitches."

This is more like the Epistle to *Troilus and Cressida* than like Marlowe.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

(1) For example *The Midnight Court*, written in the eighteenth century (and translated by Frank O'Connor), is a medieval dream vision that could have been written by Dunbar.

(2) See the essay, "Authors and Readers", in D. W. Harding, *Experience into Words*, 1963, for a discussion of this subject.

(3) As in *The Battle of Maldon*; in some of Shakespeare's Roman plays also. See Yeats, "Tomorrow's Revolution", *On the Boiler*, "Asiatic conquerors before battle invoked their ancestors, and a few years ago a Japanese admiral thanked his for guiding the torpedoes".

(4) Yeats had always thought that drama should be ritualistic, in order to be "remote, spiritual, ideal." But he had hoped to "bring the country to the town" and the dream of scholars to the city. His disillusionment with the stage, the complex feelings stirred by the Easter Rising and the Civil War left him deeply divided; feeling that only a part of the old Ireland survived, he turned increasingly for his mythology towards the Anglo-Irish civilization of the eighteenth century. The first of the Plays for Dancers, *At the Hawk's Well*, has been five times revived in Tokyo; the power of all these plays has been fully shown in recent productions in Belfast; and in England, by the Wiltshire Players.

(5) The Fool and Beggarman come in *On Baile's Strand*, where Cuchulain kills his son; the Fool and Wise Man in *The Hour Glass* ; the ritual sacrifice in *The Green Helmet*. Perhaps this last sacrifice is an ironic reversal also of the Countess Cathleen's immolation for Ireland—Maud Gonne appears in "Why should not old men be mad?" The political echo here (of the destruction of Coole Park) is not of the same kind that Yeats put into *The Dreaming of the Bones* in 1917, it does not belong to the core of the play. T. R. Henn thinks the Old Man stands for the Body and that the overcoming of Cuchulain by a squalid beggar is an acknowledgement of physical death.

Chapter Eight

EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENTS FROM STRINDBERG TO SARTRE

I MODERN FORMS

An outline of the history of Western drama in the first half of the twentieth century would trace sharp irregular curves, for different theatrical experiments cut across and repeat each other. The one constant feature is the appeal to the spectators' direct response, as individuals. The "little theatre" audience offered no collective endorsement; each member made his response alone. The commercial theatre had dwindled to a social ritual. Although as social history, the story of the public stages is full of interest, it does not belong to the history of imaginative art.

Strindberg's work, covering the end of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, initiated a new Theatre of the Dream. From his early dramas to the later plays of vision, he was continually regrouping his images and breaking up old forms. Pirandello, whose reputation suddenly blossomed at the end of the First World War, attempted a more cerebral drama of masks, which, though influential, was in itself too closely bound to the conventions it professed to evade. With Chekhov, these two represented the strongest influences of the time.

The French stage, though hospitable to all sorts of dramatic experiment throughout the nineteenth century, had not seen many native playwrights; but in the 'twenties and 'thirties of the present century a new play of masks evolved, based on Greek myth. It was a drama of crisis, determinist and ironic in mood, which lasted approximately from the mid-'twenties to the Second World War, built up by Cocteau, Giraudoux, and the early work of Anouilh and Montherlant.

The existentialist stage of Camus and Sartre, which predominated from the middle of the war for about a dozen years (roughly 1942–55), met an even sharper crisis with a new philosophy; a drama of situation cracked the rigid framework of the earlier mythological plays. This now has been succeeded by a new theatre of the Dream, often termed Theatre of the Absurd, which is related to the philosophies of Existentialism, but uses them for a quite different kind of play.

Meanwhile, in parallel development, the expressionist drama of the revolutionary writers of Eastern Europe, Andreyev and the German Kaiser and Toller had provided between 1904 and 1930 a theatre of masks for the transmission of propaganda messages. Brecht's doctrine of alienation was a necessary reaction from this simple fervour. In his complex forcing of paradoxes upon the audience, Brecht engages them not in the play itself, but in the conflict which it symbolizes.

2 STRINDBERG

Strindberg's first play, *The Father*, appeared in 1887, his last in 1909. Pirandello's two masterpieces, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Henry IV*, were written within a few weeks of each other in 1920: he died in 1936. Thus the minor curve of Yeats's development, if seen within the major curve of European drama, would be contained within the achievements of these two playwrights, whose work corresponds in time to his first and second phase—Strindberg's with the dream-plays, Pirandello with the Icons.

Strindberg's interior drama was incipient in the great works of Ibsen, especially *Peer Gynt*; it emerged more fully, in Ibsen's very latest plays. In the preface to *Lady Julie* (1888) Strindberg dissolved the unexamined current assumptions about fixed characters—"a man permanently settled and

finished"—in favour of the dynamic and the turbulent; what Yeats was to term "the unfinished man and his pain". Pirandello, who reached maturity in his fifties, elaborated his position in the preface of *Six Characters*, a document more professional and less profound. Both dramatists explore the shifting boundary between the inner and the outer world, in minds whose balance is delicately adjusted and tremulous. The question of identity—"Who am I?"—is seen not primarily as a matter of an adjustment in society, but as adjustment of conflicting systems of belief and behaviour within the self. Strindberg penetrated to the waking dream of madness and recorded his experiences in *Inferno*; Pirandello for nearly twenty years lived with a wife who suffered from a hysterical form of insanity, facing a daily struggle to maintain his identity against the twisted version of himself that her pathological jealousy imposed.

In his early plays Strindberg recognized, with a clarity that outraged his contemporaries, the element of hatred and aggression that is present in all powerful relationships, the reverse side of love. These dealt a far more drastic blow at the hypocrisy and prudery of nineteenth-century society than the revelations of the social realists, for they attacked the individual within his citadel. It is astonishing that when they were written, Freud was still an unknown practising doctor in Vienna.

For his dreams of love and hate, fantasy and violence, Strindberg demanded paradoxically a greater naturalism of setting. There must be lifelike spontaneity of movement; natural postures; real furniture, not painted canvas; the cook with her stove, the last insult of a woman's shawl wrapped round the Captain in *The Father*. Strindberg uses his stage as Ibsen might have done, when the Captain hurls a lighted lamp at his wife as the light of reason goes out in him; for Laura might be seen as a savager version of Mrs Alving, drawn from Captain Alving's point of view. She preserves

herself and her child by what could be a largely unconscious plan for destroying her husband, as the heroine of *Ghosts* had done. But Laura's mind is never disclosed, her acts and their consequences imprison the Captain in a world of objects, and he ends pillowed on the breast of his old Nurse, strapped in a strait jacket.

In *Lady Julie*, the valet, recalled to duty by the imperious ringing of his master's bell, changes into his service coat before he issues to his mistress the whispered order for her self-destruction. The dramatic force of these two plays is therefore traditional, as well as experimental, and they have remained the most actable, the most adaptable of Strindberg's work.

In the plays of his second period (1897–1909) Strindberg entered a world of dissolving shapes, where objects take on a life of their own—the growing castle, the terrifying bottle of Japanese soy brandished by the demon cook, the flowerpot with its Easter lily or hyacinth. *To Damascus* (1898–1904) holds no such stable series of events as the life of Lady Julie and her parents (which was so fully accounted for, that part of the explanation had to be crammed into the preface). Characters now melt into each other, while events continually repeat themselves in a cycle of frustration and horror. Traumatic incidents from the Stranger's childhood—often taken from Strindberg's own childhood—may suddenly erupt, and new figures reveal themselves as belonging to earlier strata.

In *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) a simple though melodramatic story is discernible through the powerful fantasies; the sinister plotter is unmasked as "the clock strikes"—which releases a perfect flood of information about his criminal past. This in turn does not prevent his receiving the hypocritical tribute of a pious public funeral. Action remains superficial; the unmaskings are important only for what they allow to be affirmed:

> They say Jesus Christ descended into hell. It means only his wanderings on this earth—his descent to that madhouse, jail, charnel, the earth. . . . Sleep, my lovely, my heartbroken girl! you've suffered so much, and none of it deserved. Sleep . . . but don't dream . . . and wake to no scorching sun, no dusty room, no tainted friendship, no damaged love. . . . (1)

The Victim who redeems—particularly the young girl—is the central figure of the last plays. Strindberg's tormented and demonic heroes are constantly being faced by accusations, menaced, condemned; or else, they are assaulted by the boredom and pettiness of living, the humiliations of sickness, the tyranny of servants, the smell of cooked cabbage, and a chronic shortage of cash. All these occur not as part of a fixed routine, such as the popular plays of environment might have shown, but as fragmentary, nightmarish intrusions upon the inner world. Like Kafka, Strindberg places the centre within, but this comes to be no longer exclusively the consciousness of the hero. In the later plays there is no longer any central character. There are victims, representatives of innocence and youth, and there are tyrants—though in *Easter* the bogeyman with sinister squeaking goloshes dwindles to a benevolent old man. But there is no longer a conflict of love and hatred. Holiness and wickedness are opposed quite simply. All characters are victims of an unstable universe, which may at any time be convulsed, so that all events reveal themselves as ambiguous. The solution is by transfiguration, or miracle; by a divine descent upon the world.

In two plays, written in 1901, *The Bridal Crown*, and *The Dream Play*, Strindberg draws unexpectedly near to the work that Yeats was writing, about this time. *The Bridal Crown* is a folk tale, set in the lakeland province of Dalecarlia, although the story was a familiar theme under all sorts of guises—the betrayed girl, the murdered child, the cruel penalty. Kirsten, who submits to her fate, is the redeeming Victim of the play;

she stands for all that is naturally good, but she is transformed by her sufferings to a state of holiness, such as that of Elena in *Easter*. The daughter of Indra, who descends to earth in the *The Dream Play*, makes the same sacrifice (in Buddhist terms) as the Countess Cathleen in Yeats.

That Strindberg could write these fairy tales, combining the idyllic and the violent, at the same time that he was producing *The Dance of Death*, his most appalling study of marital hatred, serves only as one indication of his range. He is almost the only writer of his time who succeeded both as dramatist and novelist; the fluid, molten quality of his imagination never allowed him to revise—he rewrote. His works run to something like forty volumes, and although some of them were ephemeral, there is a certain kind of power which comes only with professional habit, a technical assurance that in lesser writers may be dangerous, but which, when allied to such a genius as Strindberg's, confers true authority.

"It is myself that I remake"—Yeats's words would apply to his great contemporary with particular force, for the autobiographical element is everywhere distinguishable. It was by self-exploration that Strindberg discovered the murderous yet too-recognizable conflicts that make up his plays and novels. When he began to write, psychiatry was in a very early stage of its modern development—the Nancy school beginning its studies. Strindberg, in non-scientific terms, explored the same regions of the mind.

The Captain's distorted vision controls *The Father*, but the later plays are not directed from any particular point of view. Only the fact that they are designed for some select few to understand prevents them from being transcripts of nightmare or madness; but this narrow distinction indicates the imaginative triumph. Many an unfortunate might endorse Strindberg's plays; none but Strindberg composed them. Ravings do not communicate to others, as these plays do; on on the other hand, like the violent later plays of Yeats, they

certainly demand a level of insight which could not have been expected of an audience in Strindberg's day. By now they might be comprehensible to a public trained by Harold Pinter, Ann Jellicoe, and the films of Hitchcock.

3 PIRANDELLO

Many of Pirandello's plays have lost their original force; the notion that truth varies with the eye of the beholder is no longer novel. *Right you are (if you think so)* demolishes the notion of "plain unvarnished truth" somewhat laboriously, with the aid of a commentator. Two people each explain that the other suffers from illusions about the identity of a third. The third person appears and says they are both right. This complicated shuttling to and fro of rival versions of truth transforms the traditional Italian stagecraft about mistaken identity into a philosophical puzzle; basically, it is not unlike Goldoni. The real protest is against the cruel prying vulgarity of the crowd of town gossips, given in the anguish of the three principals at the attempt to tear out the facts of their privacy; but the indictment of this brutality is not pursued, and indeed it is often overlooked, in accounts of the play.

A witty burlesque of conventional behaviour—the code for jealous husbands—had been started by Chiarelli with *The Mask and the Face* (1916), and a burlesque of theatrical material can be found in Pirandello, who likes to invert conventional situations. Such mockery loses its force when the object of mockery itself disappears; Pirandello implies a heavy, solid layer of accepted commonplace, to be flouted; of bourgeois respectability, to be dazzled. Both are now much diminished. In *Each in His Own Way* (1924) the drama suddenly turns out to be a play-within-the-play; the curtain having fallen rises at once to show spectators hurrying out to discuss the latest "line of nonsense by Pirandello". The hall of mirrors is extended when some of the "spectators"

begin to re-enact the "play" which is about their "real" life; finally the manager declares the whole thing must stop.

In such plays, the pathos and puzzle are united by contrasting acting with life, as a way of contrasting illusion and reality. Some of Pirandello's plays are improvised in the traditional Italian way (2), but his two masterpieces depend on the-play-within-the play, the restless switching of levels and the rather oppressive pathos of a trapped and vulnerable hero.

The six characters in search of an author had haunted Pirandello—"born alive, they wished to live". But he could not find a philosophical significance to justify them, till he realized that this situation in itself supplied the justification.

The three main rôles had in fact appeared in previous plays (3); here their confused story is too well known to them to be communicated clearly, as they drift in from outer space to the stage of a public threatre, begging for incarnation.

> One is born to life in many forms, in many shapes, as tree or as stone, as water, as butterfly, or as woman. So one may also be born a character in a play . . . he who has the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death. He cannot die. . . . We want to live . . . only for a moment . . . in you.

The inarticulate misery of the Mother, the strident passion of the Daughter and the remorse of the Father stand out in high relief from the old-fashioned melodrama which is their "story". The Son refuses to take up his rôle. When the two children are killed, in which world does this occur? The Father cries out to the theatre manager:

> Pretence? Reality, sir, reality!

In *Henry IV* the hero had long lived within a historical masquerade, which to his disordered fancy was reality; he

emerges from it to avenge his lost years by a murder, which drives him back to the safety and prison of makebelieve.

The tragic dreamer is imprisoned in his mask and not liberated; Pirandello suffered from the disabling weight of Italian professional theatre—probably the most powerful tradition in Europe of its kind. His cerebral drama gives an exaggerated display of intellectual agility, that does not disguise emotional poverty. The only motive used is marital jealousy or infidelity, sometimes with the cuckold as hero. The claim to be writing mockery only intensifies the meagre brittleness of the lesser plays; within each of them, there is an opera by Leoncavallo demanding to be let out.

The imprisoned author is presented clearly in *When You are Somebody* (1933) where the hero is not permitted to tamper with his own public image, and is made to repudiate uncharacteristic writings.

Between his overwhelming technical inheritance, and his rather limited intellectual puzzles, Pirandello acquired a dangerous fluency and wrote himself out. The contrast with Strindberg shows on the one hand, a questing, untrammelled mind, too powerful to accept any regular form; on the other, an intellectual rebel who was largely a conformist in disguise. Strindberg, by the turn of the century, had already anticipated, for example, much of the work of D. H. Lawrence. Pirandello was content merely to dazzle; he never rejected Mussolini's régime, though he courageously directed that neither Church nor State should offer any professional ministrations at his death.

> No flowers on the bed, and no lighted candle. A pauper's cart. Naked. And let no one accompany me, neither relatives nor friends. The cart, the horse, a driver, *è basta.* Burn me. . . .

Pirandello's influence, on the French stage in particular, is of more importance than his achievement. The two great

plays apart, he will not stand up to comparison with a great traditionalist such as Lorca, who was also an experimenter.

4 THE ICONS OF CRISIS; DRAMA IN THE 'TWENTIES AND 'THIRTIES

Drama had been used as a political weapon in Russia at the time of the abortive revolution of 1904; in Germany the revolutionary Expressionists, especially Kaiser and Toller, influenced the whole drama of the 'thirties. In America, Eugène O'Neill and Elmer Rice, in Ireland Sean O'Casey, were influenced by expressionism; in England, political drama in the 'thirties climbed rapidly to the protest of the year of Munich, and then fell off abruptly.

From Andreyev's *Play of Man* (1908) onwards, the Icon of Everyman is set in a world dominated by blind forces, and inhabited by puppets. Man addresses his useless prayers and curses to the faceless Grey One, and ends by hurling a speech of defiance into the void. In the evil Cities of Kaiser and Toller, Man is opposed by machines and mechanical villainy. Morality is a matter of black and white; wicked choruses of stockbrokers, armaments men, military leaders are seen as "them", while Man is "us". This Marxist drama snatches at shock techniques—broken sequences, ballet and cinema interludes, songs and tableaux; it records the abolition of Man. There is a reductive treatment of the Enemy, while all the suffering and sensibility is concentrated in one Promethean figure, the victim–hero. These Revolutionary plays are only tolerable in a revolutionary context; they survive as documentaries of the times in which they appeared. The dichotomy is too drastic, the instructive aim too narrow; they are the Morality Plays of the new religion. From them came the blank featureless figures used by the political poets of the 'thirties in England; Auden's Mr and Mrs A in the *The Ascent of F.6* (1936) and the whole structure of *On*

the Frontier (1938); Stephen Spender's *Trial of a Judge* (1938), and MacNeice's *Out of the Picture* (1937) (4). As early as 1928, Sean O'Casey had borrowed a scene from Toller, when in *The Silver Tassie* the crucified soldier hears the prayer of the guns.

The marks of extreme violence never found their place in England; in France they appeared in more traditional form. In Germany, Brecht developed his theory of alienation in natural opposition to the earlier doctrinaire style. The passionate fervour of Toller's *Hinkelmann* or *Masses and Men* could not be accepted for very long. Even in such an early play as *The Exception and the Rule*, written for schoolchildren, Brecht could show the ineffectual goodness of the peasants failing against the initiative and ruthless vigour of the capitalist; "The weak man dies, the hardy man survives"—to be acquitted for his crimes in a court of Injustice. It is the hardihood of Azdak and of the peasant heroine that triumph in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Brecht's kind of conviction allows for irony as well as decision; *Mother Courage* unites pity and scorn.

The French use of myth reinforced a more ironic determinism. It allowed the dramatists to blame the gods without necessarily subscribing to their existence; and yet, on the other hand, by sharp deflation of a heroic story, to create a stimulating paradox. The modern instance is superimposed upon the ancient heroics, in the manner of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, when in Giraudoux's *Tiger at the Gates*, the Gates of War swing open to show Helen seducing Troilus. Aegisthus is in love with Electra, and Clytemnestra murders her husband because she loathes certain trivial habits (*Electre*, 1937).

These plays of Giraudoux, with Cocteau's *Orphée* (1926) and *La Machine Infernal* (1934), Montherlant's *Pasiphae* (1938) and various adaptations of Greek plays had established the mythological drama before the Second World War; it was in the 'forties, however, that it became re-animated much

more powerfully—not then to support determinism but to repudiate it.

In Sartre's heroic Orestes, the pangs of privation, the "feel of not to feel it", become paradoxically the sign of triumph, for where there is pain there is life, and where there is life, the power of free choice.

ORESTES: You are king of the gods, Jupiter, king of stones and of stars, king of the waves of the sea. But not king of men.

JUPITER: I am not your king, presumptuous insect? Who created you?

ORESTES: You did. But there was no need to create me with free will.

JUPITER: I gave you freedom to serve me.

ORESTES: Perhaps you did. But my free will has turned against you now, and neither of us can do anything about it (5).

In these plays of crisis, the authors had "learnt a style from a despair"; violence was necessary for their drama of protest, and they found it in ancient myth. *The Flies* appeared in 1943, Anouilh's *Antigone* in 1944. As Antigone goes to bury her brother with a child's wooden spade, all the defencelessness of the unarmed rebel is behind the detail; the pathos is not deflating. "I am not here to understand, I am here to say NO" was a line that meant more to the first audiences than it ever could do again; but unlike the German Expressionist drama, this is not merely a documentary of the Resistence, for the enemy are not reduced to puppets.

Plays of Greek myth ceased after 1945; Camus expressly repudiated them (6). Instead, a sumptuous variety of historic settings stock the new cultural supermarket. Anouilh and Audiberti have taken Joan of Arc as subject, Montherland Spanish and Italian history (in *The Master of Santiago*, 1948 and *Malatesta*, 1950). Sartre used German settings for *Lucifer and the Lord* (1951) and *Altona* (1959)—though in the

last the name of the hero is Franz, a transparent disguise for an indictment that Sartre is making much nearer home than Hamburg. The plague-stricken city of *The Flies* reappears in Camus' *State of Siege* (1948); and has been widely used as a general symbol, because of Artaud's application of it to the theatre in *The Theatre and its Double*. Plays about the theatre and its masks, from Cocteau's *Impromptu de Paris* (1937) and Anouilh's *Eurydice* (1942) to Sartre's *Kean* (1953), Ionesco's *Impromptu de l'Alma* (1956) and Genet's *The Blacks* (1959), have mixed the older influence of Pirandello with more violent contemporary forces.

It seems unlikely that any myth could at the moment establish itself with the authority that Expressionism had for the revolutionary writers of the 'twenties or that classical myth assumed thirty years ago. Icons are needed at times of definite and sharply experienced crisis, but in the troubled, ominous, unstable world of today, the Dream and the "game" of theatrical illusion open a more valid way.

5 EXISTENTIALIST THEATRE; SARTRE AND CAMUS

A tradition which is both denied and believed—believed with the will, but not the intellect—produces plays of paradox and contradiction. The estrangement of the writer from his beliefs is shown by an irony which the affirmations succeed—but only narrowly succeed—in containing. The poignancy of the human condition is strengthened, while its pretensions are sharply deflated. This has already been seen in the plays of Dryden.

The Existentialist paradox, that man is condemned to be free, means that nowhere more exclusively than in the hour of defeat can he assert his identity as an act of will, or choice. Alone of natural beings, man can create his own identity out of what he is given—in Yeats's term, the "body of fate". All men know that their acts may be vain, as many are; yet

vulnerable spirits in the grip of hostile forces may sustain themselves by the great Images of the heroic past, to a limited extent. Since, however, the Image represent a security of belief that belongs to the past, it produces a paradox to superimpose this past upon the present. True Icons inhabit an eternal Present, so that time does not enter into their ceremonies, or enters only to be overcome. The ironic flash which joins heroic past to squalid present in such plays as Sartre's (or in Yeats's *Death of Cuchulain*) isolates the hero's act of choice, which serves to join these two incompatibles together. As Sartre has said, the Icon is a means of escaping from the merely psychological conception of events:

> The theatre as conceived of in the period between the wars, and as perhaps it is still thought of in the United States, is a theatre of characters. . . . What is universal to our way of thinking is not nature but the situations in which man finds himself; that is, not the sum total of all the psychological traits, but the limits that enclose him on all sides. . . . He is faced with the necessity of having to work and die, of being hurled into a life which is already complete, which is yet his own enterprise and in which he can never have a second chance; where he must play his cards and take the risks, no matter what the cost. This is why we feel the urge to put on the stage certain situations which throw light on the main aspects of the condition of man, and to have the spectator participate in the free choice which man makes in these situations. . . . For us, psychology is the most abstract of the sciences because it studies our passions without plunging them back into their true human surroundings (7).

It follows that Corneille rather than Racine was the model for these playwrights of crisis, since he "shows will at the core of passion". The Greek myth was for French dramatists an inherited form; it gave some measure of continuity within the native tradition. The mingling of inflation and irony it

allowed can again be compared—as the reference to Corneille will suggest—with something of the same mixture in Dryden's post-war theatre.

To accept the paradox of man who "deprived of general truths", is tormented by an absolute aspiration (8), it is assumed that all established creeds and the stability that comes from them must be abandoned; and yet that man is condemned to be no less than man—a rational animal. The anguish of the gap between what man can conceive or imagine, and what circumstances permit him to be, springs from his homeless alienated state. He is estranged from Nature, "heartless, witless Nature", since

the crime of being born
Blackens all our lot.

Yet, whatever their differences, Sartre, Camus and others of the existentialists would claim

as by a soldier's right
A charter to commit the crime once more—

the crime of being born and thereby alienated from the unconscious state of Nature, yet dying with the prospect of total annihilation, rejecting all consolation, whether offered in Christian or Marxist-Expressionist terms.

Altona represents the most acute torments of this position in the hero, Franz, who, after helping a Rabbi to escape a concentration camp, is sent to the Eastern front as an honourable alternative to suicide. Living in torment with his memories of how he tortured Russian partisans, he can support existence only by imagining that Germany is still starving and broken, and therefore he was justified in staving off defeat at any cost. Life on "the other side of despair" need not demand the presence of the torturers, as in the war play, *Men without Shadows*; the will of his haughty family brings

Franz to the conflict of power, where the responsibility for criminal acts must be acknowledged, and yet the self must be judged only by itself. The audience may here project themselves and feel the choice to be their own, in its strength and vulnerability. Strong hero or weak chorus are equally themselves.

Thus, though Fate may be fixed, the responsibility for choice is not denied and this entails a direct and full relation of the hero with other characters. The moment of choice creates a man out of his "makings".

The doctrine of the Absurd, as formulated by Camus, postulated a total dissociation between the random chancy events of Nature (the dance of the atoms, the fortuitous groupings of society) and the interior world of man. In spite of the overwhelming pressure of external things upon sentient beings, which could produce situations of extreme horror and incongruity, man must nevertheless attempt by means of *la raison* to adjust and reconcile himself with the envelope or shell of things. The gap between the random and the rational, which is the same as that between the irresponsible and the responsible, between necessity and freedom, is the region of tragic choice. In *Caligula*, the hero who suddenly perceives this gap decides to act out all the random irrational atrocity which the frame of things allows, as a demonstration of the position to his fellow men. He becomes a kind of Black Icon, tragic in the style of Marlowe's Jew of Malta.

In *The Just*, the exact limits of terrorism that are permitted is the subject of debate; the hero rejects the lure of cheap escape or consolation, and the sole prospect that is left of any union in love is the community of death "a dark night . . . on the same rope". The pressure of environment may drive man to an act for which, nevertheless, as conscious and responsible man, he has to pay. This is not so far as might at first appear from the stern and paradoxical doctrines of Claudel. It is much firmer and more committed than the analogous

discussions about the limits of crime that are permissable for the cause in Sartre's *Crime Passionel*—a play in which psychology, in spite of good intentions, seems once more to be breaking in.

As early as *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Camus formulated his doctrine of the Absurd—that which does not cohere, which is incongruous. In defining the relation between man and his world as "absurd" in this musico-mathematical sense, Camus emphasized that all easy ways of escaping the conflict, such as suicide, must be ruled out. In "the harrowing and marvellous wager of the absurd" man must vote for life. This attitude Camus calls Revolt, and "L'homme revolté" is he who has recovered the unity of existence.

> The body, compassion, the created world, action, human nobility will then resume their place in this insane world. Man will find again the wine of absurdity and the bread of indifference, which nourished his greatness (9).

The assertion of values is in the last resort a matter of choice. As Camus said in the *Lettre à un ami allemand*: "I have chosen justice . . . so as to keep faith with the earth."

Sisyphus, hero of the Absurd, is tragic because he recognizes his plight.

> Where would his tortures be indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? . . . The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.
>
> This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Like Dante's Brunetto on the burning sand, he seems as one who has won, although he lost. There is no higher fate than human destiny. Sisyphus is the last and most heroic of the Icons, whose outward act of complete futility is transformed by inward revolt.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

(1) *The Ghost Sonata*, scene 3. My own translation.

(2) In 1930 he wrote *Tonight we Improvise*, in which he attacked the all-powerful theatre director. It is amusing to realize that improvising is the latest (1964) fashion on the New York stage.

(3) They had appeared in the play immediately preceding, *All for the Best*, but in reversed positions; this play in turn had inverted a simple anti-romantic comedy of 1916, *Think of it, Giacomino!* All these plays depict the cuckold as hero—a theme which was to be given some fashion by Crommelynik's *Le Cocu Magnifique* (1921).

(4) The figures in these plays repeat each other, e.g. Stagworth, Valerian, Spielmann are basically the same capitalist villain; the Judge's wife, Lady Isobel, Clara de Groot provide feminine counterparts.

(5) Sartre, *The Flies*, III, 2. My own translation.

(6) See John Cruikshank, *Albert Camus* (1959), p. 192.

(7) Sartre, *Forgers of Myths* (1946). Quoted from Toby Cole, *Playwrights on Playwriting* (New York, 1961).

(8) Iris Murdoch, *Sartre* (1953), p. 69. For the comparison with Dryden, see Chapter Six above, p. 115.

(9) Walter Kaufman, *Existentialism, Dostoievsky to Sartre* (New York, 1956), gives the full translation of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, from which these quotations are taken.

Chapter Nine

ELIOT AS DRAMATIST

I THE NIGHTMARE DREAM

ELIOT's debt to Yeats has been generously acknowledged. Ezra Pound supplied a link between them as dramatists; a close friend of both, he introduced them to the Noh plays of Japan, which in turn they took as a model.

Transformation, or metamorphosis of character became the foundation of Eliot's plays as it had been of Yeats's drama. Superimposing the past upon the present in a more intricate pattern, Eliot used sharp transitions from one to the other as a means of ordering futility in the present. Deep firm lines from a tragic tale of ancient Thebes are scored on the harsh but unheroic ground of a north country squire's family troubles; the shades of Colonus deepen the colour of a beech tree in the Home Counties. Eliot's usual background, however, had not been rural, like that of Yeats; and a modern metropolitan scene is implied in all the later plays. The heroes are public figures, though met only in private life.

Eliot learnt from the French theatre of the 'thirties that irony could be strengthened by setting together ancient heroism and modern triviality; it gives what Yeats termed "an emotion of multitude"—like that of plot and contrasted subplot. The spectator is forced to respond in two different ways simultaneously to the same situation, and so his own personal interpretation is stirred up.

Although he had made his reputation as a poet for the few, Eliot's first notion for the theatre was to revive music hall. *Sweeney Agonistes*, though but a fragment, is perhaps his most modern play. Returning to the London stage by way of pageanty and festival drama, he "aspired to Shaftesbury

Avenue" and in at least one play, *The Cocktail Party*, achieved this kind of success. Eliot asked that all his plays should be judged as experiments, and has expressed his dissatisfaction with all; but his influence, example and prestige were vital at a certain period—roughly the twenty years between 1935 and 1955—for the development of English imaginative drama. He has been more influential as a propagandist for drama than as a dramatist; his dramatic ideas, which provided, with those of Yeats, the only attempt since Dryden to construct a theory of the drama in England, have undergone radical changes as a result of his practice.

From the early 'twenties Eliot wrote on the Elizabethan dramatists and on classical drama, but it was not till his religious and social preoccupations of the 'thirties gave him the necessary drive towards public statement that he produced *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), a play designed for those who go to religious festivals and expect to be patiently bored but who are "prepared to put up with poetry". It may be that Eliot's mastery of the dramatic monologue was a handicap in his search for a full dramatic form; in his first play, as he has admitted, there was only one dramatic character, the hero. (Angus Wilson once remarked that the Puritan mentality tends to see a central character who is very large, surrounded by much smaller characters; in Eliot the doctrinal Anglo-Catholic does not succeed in overlaying completely the temperamental Puritan.)

Murder in the Cathedral gratified Eliot's ten-year-old ambition; it is also a landmark in English dramatic history; for it proved that English verse drama could still succeed, and Eliot's younger contemporaries hastened to follow him. A number of verse plays came out in the later 'thirties, though none of these has maintained itself as *Murder in the Cathedral* has done. His first play may well turn out to be Eliot's most enduring stage success, for though not often professionally performed it can be successfully played by amateurs.

The formal simplicity of the character groups, the contrast between the crisp verse of the Hero or his enemies, and the nightmare dreams of the Chorus, or its lyrical hymns, achieve a consistent simplification. It is a classically severe style.

I once saw a performance of a play of Euripides in the Theatre of Herodas Atticus under the Acropolis. The main characters were formal and hieratic, as they stood in their masks; they might have been reciting an old ballad, worn smooth with familiarity. The Chorus of women, supple, responsive in mood, moving in a slow dance of fear or joy, evoked an immediate response, and carried all the emotional significance of the story.

Something like this may be felt in *Murder in the Cathedral.* Thomas à Becket's story is known, to him, to the tempters, to the audience; death and what comes after death is already settled; the fine point of decision is all the finer. This play exists as a moment in time, a moment of choice which brings in something outside time. "The point of the intersection of Time with the Timeless" is the point of Incarnation, and Thomas, after surmounting the temptation of the senses, of power, of private revenge and "the last temptation" of pride makes his decision, on behalf of all. He is the one who sees, who has the responsibility of making the choice. By this decision he crosses an internal boundary line, after which he is "not in danger; only near to death". The actual murder is a ritual performance by the Knights, who then are rapidly transformed into modern demagogues and address the audience rather than the Chorus in their ingenious justifications. By his death, Thomas has released new spiritual forces into the world, as the Chorus see in the end.

The Chorus, those who "do not wish anything to happen", the humble women of Canterbury, acknowledge their share of the guilt. For them, there is still hope and fear, pleading and remorse, new assaults from the powers of darkness whose presence they scent upon the air. In a sense although

Thomas is the Hero, the Chorus remains the chief actor. Eliot has said that he wrote the play as a protest against totalitarianism in Europe, and the final speeches of the Knights now bear only too familiar a sound. Thomas is not to be allowed the glory of being a martyr; the verdict is that his death was self-provoked, "suicide while of unsound mind".

The poets of the 'thirties took up such political themes; and within the last few years the story of Beckett has been used by other playwrights. Anouidh's Beckett chooses the honour of God, and thus is bound to ignore the honour of the King. Like Antigone, he says:

I shan't try to convince you. I shall only say no (1).

The severity and simplicity of Eliot's medieval pageant play are at the opposite extreme to the complexity of *The Family Reunion* (1939). There is a close relation between the plot and that of *Sweeney Agonistes*, written in 1926. A "nightmare dream" of a drowned murdered woman, interspersed with ominous songs, and the cheap clichés of the uncomprehending Chorus, build up a comedy of menace. In the one story, the murderer "does a girl in" and keeps her in a bath; in the other, she is lost in the Atlantic Ocean, but the remorse and isolation of the "murderers" are the same.

Sweeney came from Eliot's own personal mythology. The author was perhaps influenced to some extent by Cocteau in choosing the rhythms of the music hall for *Sweeney Agonistes*, but he based the fragment on Pound's Noh, and Yeats's adaptations; expecting the primitive drum-beat to be maintained throughout. He wrote with the idea that the spectators, like the characters, would be graded in degrees of understanding; that only a few would understand the hero. For the rest, since he hoped for a popular audience, he depended on "doing monkey tricks behind the audience's back" (2).

This is a play full of gaps in communication, and Sweeney cannot hope to explain.

I gotta use words when I talk to you.
But if you understand me or if you don't,
That's nothing to me and nothing to you.

The three main phases of Eliot's dramatic writing show him moving from the idea of a rhetorical, "distanced" presentation—that of *Sweeney Agonistes* and the critical writings of the 'twenties—to a theatre that would be socially useful—his view in the early 'thirties. Finally he became preoccupied with the technique of making effects indirectly. Concealed and unobtrusive rhythm replaced the drum beat, and like "concealed lighting" on a picture, made its effect without being noticed. By this means, Eliot hoped to cut across all stratifications of public taste.

One of his chief difficulties has always been the method by which the superhuman may be presented. In *Murder in the Cathedral* he was able to write from Christian presuppositions, but in other plays the problem has produced some very eccentric solutions. An unpublished ending for *Sweeney Agonistes* introduced (to the sound of the Angelus) a figure resembling Father Christmas, who bore a champagne bottle (empty) and an alarm clock; he wore evening dress with a carnation in the buttonhole

THE OLD GENTLEMAN: Good evening. My name is Time. . . . I wait for the lost trains that bring in the last souls after midnight. The time by the exchange clock is now 9.46.

SWEENEY: Have you nothing else to say?

OLD GENTLEMAN: Have you nothing to ask me?

SWEENEY: Yes.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Good.

SWEENEY: When will the barnfowl fly before morning?
When will the owl be operated on for cataract?
When will the eagle get out of his barrel-roll?

OLD GENTLEMAN: When the camel is too tired to walk further,
Then shall the pigeon pie blossom in the desert
At the wedding breakfast of life and death . . . (3).

It was perhaps as well that Eliot suppressed this ending; but the wedding breakfast of life and death concludes *The Family Reunion* (1939), in the bizarre ritual of blowing out candles on the birthday cake. ("Out, out, brief candle".)

This drama, which appeared less than six months after Yeats's *Purgatory*, includes in its houseparty a troupe of family ghosts; like Yeats's beggar man, Lord Monchensey inhabits "the past that is always present". The core of Eliot's third tragic monodrama is played out among dead shadows and live puppets. Harry Monchensey, who is "rather psychic, as they say", endures his inner solitude without hope of release or of understanding. He is one of the Hollow Men. His dead father's wish to kill his mother produced the fearful waking dream in which he saw himself as the murderer of his wife; the misery of the dead threw a shadow of remorse on the living. Agatha, who exorcises the dead, had loved his father, and prevented the murder to save the unborn child—himself. She is therefore his true mother, and he, in accepting a vicarious suffering and continuing to endure it, becomes momentarily both her lover and her child.

You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.

The exchange of "death's dream kingdom" for enlightenment frees him from his invisible chains, and from the rôle that his original mother would impose; his election takes him away on an unknown quest, for "liberty is a different kind of pain from prison". This act of choice kills his mother, since she has maintained herself by the trivialities of routine and now "the clock has stopped in the dark".

The most innocent is he who suffers most; Harry's ruthlessness, which appears as shock or discontinuity, marks his escape from "the war of phantoms". The question of responsibility or "punishment", which has misled some literal-minded critics, has been handled with sure insight by D. W. Harding (4), who sees the play as a study in separation experience, or psychological weaning—the final parting of Harry and his mother. Like Thomas crossing an internal boundary line, Harry enters into a new relation with everyone and passes to a state "on the other side of despair". The Furies become transformed to "the bright angels"; instead of fleeing, he must follow.

For the moment of enlightenment, Eliot took as immediate model Jean Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine* (1934), a play on the story of Oedipus. Agatha, enlightening Harry, like the Sphinx enlightening Oedipus, holds the threads of fate, steps into the place left vacant by the Furies between the windows, assumes the goddess (5). The flashback in time enlarges the scene.

The Sphinx, as Nemesis, says:

> I weave, I winnow, I wind, I knit, I plait, I cross, I go over it again and again, I tie and untie again and again, retaining the smallest knots.

And Agatha, as Athena:

> *A curse comes to birth*
> *As a child is formed. . . .*
> *According to the phase*
> *Of the determined moon . . .*
> *The knot shall be unknotted,*
> *And the crooked made straight.*

The Infernal Machine, "one of the most perfect ever constructed by the infernal gods for the destruction of a mortal", is the vehicle of a determinist ethic. It gives a grand and cosmic assertion of a purely negative kind. Cocteau, "the

first of his generation, even before Giraudoux, to reinterpret Greek tragedy, because the new era needed a Racine" (6), reinterpreted it in the light of *Phèdre*. This return to tradition, when used as a basis for "Freudian" studies of character, gave grandeur to statements of cosmic unbelief and defiance.

It was natural that Eliot should take this determinist pattern and adapt it to "play tricks behind the audience's back". Much earlier, he had defined the uses of myth, and praised the method of Yeats's Plays for Dancers:

> Myth . . . is simply a way of controlling, ordering, of giving shape and significance to the great panorma of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. . . . Instead of narrative method we may now use mythical method. It is, I believe, a step towards making the modern world possible for art . . . towards form (7).

The form was not clearly established, but I would think that the story is not only one of separation, but of initiation. Harry sets out on a quest, the goal being unknown, while the Chorus, who have "lost their way in the dark", regain their unreal trivial existence; they recoil from the possibility of initiation

> *as if the earth should open*
> *Right to the centre, as I was about to cross Pall Mall.*

There are large and deliberate gaps in knowledge here; there are also mistakes. Eliot acknowledged the injudiciousness of presenting the Furies visually. He has also said that his sympathy is now with the mother, and Harry seems an insufferable prig. This perhaps only proves the completeness with which he has dissociated himself from the limitations of his hero.

Harry's ironic wit, his torments, the nature of his relations with his mother are reminiscent not only of Orestes, but of Hamlet. There is no way in which Harry can communicate

the nature of his inner suffering, or even recognize it, and Eliot noted this as a characteristic of *Hamlet*. "Loathing diffused" when he is inside his waking dream, dissociated obsession when he is outside, are represented dramatically for the audience by the gaps or jumps between different dramatic levels; and these in turn are represented by different kinds of verse. Characters engaged in ordinary conversation suddenly enter a trancelike state, in which they utter prophecies, while the Chorus of uncles and aunts occasionally emerge from their satisfied triviality to utter a general confession of fear or discomfort.

> *And the past is about to happen, and the future was long*
> *since settled.*
> *And the wings of the future darken the past, the beak and*
> *claws have desecrated . . .*
> *Have torn*
> *The roof from the house, or perhaps it was never there.*

In all three plays, Eliot presents on the dramatic level a contrast between the Hero who bears the burden of guilt and insight, and the Chorus, who can respond, if at all, only by intuition. In *Sweeney Agonistes*, the ominous pounding rhythm, the echoes and repetitions, sustain an atmosphere of menace. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, the crisp astringent dialogue of Thomas with his enemies or his uncomprehending friends alternates with the poetic rhythms of the Chorus and with the prose of Thomas's sermon or the address of the murderers. These are spoken directly to the audience—for this, of course, Eliot had precedent in his medieval model, since *Everyman* concludes with a sermon on pride. The technical problems involved in presenting different dramatic levels of speech, including the most familiar and banal, have been treated by Eliot as the most important aspect of his work. Earlier poets who wrote for the stage were content to produce lines that "could not have been spoken by anyone

but a poetry reciter". To maintain a certain level of artifice and yet to avoid the limitations of the consciously "poetic" posed a problem which Eliot succeeded in solving for himself, but which he could not solve for others.

Gradually the ghosts and choruses of the Greek models are dispensed with, until, in his last three plays, Eliot confines himself to the flat speech of everyday. To have taken the superficial talk of the drawing room and exposed what lies beneath is perhaps not an unexpected thing for the author of *Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady* to have done. The drawing room at least has the advantage that its range of tone and inflection is restricted. For one of the chief difficulties which Eliot had to meet was the strong individuality of his own poetic accent. When "the author and character are speaking in unison" the lines become powerful and memorable. Ironic wit or the lyric cry are within Eliot's compass; but he cannot present Doris and Dusty, Eggerson or Mrs Piggott except sardonically. "May I pour a drop of oil on these troubled waters?" or "She'll come back to tell us more about the peace and quiet" hit off a type, almost too neatly.

The difficulty of integrating a deep and central vision with alien trivialities has been met by applying a great deal of theory, a great deal of reading and taking a great deal of pains. In this Eliot resembles that Elizabethan dramatist whose achievement he once brilliantly summarized—Ben Jonson. Much of his art, like Jonson's, is an art of caricature; it is judicious, and passionate at the core, but it remains an art for the few. These few, however, include his fellow-writers, who do not imitate him directly but have been stimulated by his work to develop on quite different lines of their own. His drama has worked like yeast, not upon the stage, but upon the writers. He should not be held responsible for Christopher Fry—who would probably have written in any case—but seen rather as an indirect influence behind the very different work of Pinter or Albee.

2 LATER PLAYS; THE ICONS

In Eliot's last three plays, the themes of Initiation, Adoption and the Quest are pursued, with some faint resonance from the Greek myths of Alcestis, Ion and Oedipus at Colonus. By now, the dramatic theory that poetry "should be put on a thin diet" had evolved; the rhythm had become almost imperceptible, for to Eliot his first necessity was to accept the language of ordinary speech, even its deterioration. The poet should be prepared to lay down a tradition which he could not hope to perfect, to submit himself to the language available, in the available dramatic forms.

Eliot therefore took the shabby professional form of drawing room comedy—a much less promising medium than the music hall. It remained stiffly detachable from what he chose to put into it. The sets for *The Cocktail Party* were carefully commonplace, the cigarettes by Abdulla and the stockings by Kayser Bondor. So strict was the purging of ornament that Eliot said: "It is perhaps an open question whether there is any poetry in the play at all."

From time to time, however, the façade of social banality rolls away to reveal some deliberate piece of mystification. Gaps in knowledge remain around the hero and the sacrificial victim. The mysterious sanatorium recalls that

> *The whole world is our hospital*
> *Endowed by the ruined millionaire*
> (*Little Gidding*)

The Libations are vaguely religious, Sir Henry dismisses his patients with the adjuration of Buddha to his disciples and the leading lady is crucified offstage (for which reason, I have been told, the play cannot be staged in France, as no leading lady will forgo her appearance in the last act). Except for Sir Henry's brief assumption of the role of Hercules when he first appears (including a bawdy song), and his

quotation of *Prometheus Unbound* at the end, to describe his psychic vision, there is not much in the way of supernatural shock for the audience. Flat mystification, seen from the outside, does not extend the boundaries of the play; on the contrary, it merely blocks the spectator's way to inserting his own cosmic views. The Initiates, who know the way of illumination, are gradually revealed, but their peculiar ritual is bound to seem trivial; perhaps if it were in a really unknown language, like the Sanscrit benediction at the end of *The Waste Land*, the effect would be less disturbing. The Unknown Guest, who turns out to be the Unknown God of modern secular society, the analyst, carries his burden of insight, leads the novices to make their choices, and sends them on their several quests. One after another, the puppets admit their private, vulnerable, secret life; in the end, all are saved and the play is called a Comedy.

Although Eliot's model has not been directly copied, yet the younger playwrights have worked upon principles which he was the first to point out. They have used broken, repetitive, almost inarticulate speech, charged with the ominous power that Eliot sought in his underlying rhythm, the "hidden" drumbeat. In particular, Harold Pinter's earlier comedy seems to reflect Eliot indirectly. *The Birthday Party*, whose very title is reminiscent, shows the unlucky hero being abducted, after a scene of mystification, by two diabolical Guardians, to be treated at an unknown destination by a sinister and powerful character, Monty (who may be either military or sartorial or diabolic). The hero's inability to communicate is crucial.

Eliot has made the point that a major writer deserves to be read as a whole, and his last three plays offer a special kind of interest for the light they throw on each other and on the themes of his earlier work. The images of the various characters in these plays have acquired an identity that persists from one play to the next. For example, Gomez and

Mrs Cargill, the man of affairs and the prying chatterbox, seem dark refashionings of Alex and Julia from *The Cocktail Party*. Given the peculiar flatness of character and the brief, abrupt, nature of the action, it is particularly tempting to trace such patterns, derived presumably from Eliot's Internal Society.

The most persistent, I think, is the Imaginary Murder, which can be found also in the lyrics. In *Sweeney Agonistes* and *The Family Reunion*, it is murder of a woman, wife or mistress; in *The Elder Statesman*, of an old man. There are two real murders, which are both martyrdoms, Thomas's and Celia's; two offstage deaths of parents caused by the son's defection. External action culminates in Initiation; to the martyrs by death; to Harry, by the divine Agatha, as Athena; to Colby, by another incarnation of Athena, Mrs Guzzard; to Lord Claverton and his son, by his "ghosts". Ghosts and messengers from another world appear everywhere—Pereira on the telephone, an ominous threatening visitant; Thomas's tempters, from his past life; Harry's Furies; Celia, and by way of parody, Lavinia's aunt; Mrs Guzzard, with the news of Colby's dead father: Gomez and Maisie.

The sacrament of Initiation is penance or confession, which admits to the divine Adoption; with adoption a new identity is acquired and a new kind of suffering, which is purgatorial.

The symmetry of the plot is always so obvious that careful impressions of spontaneity have to be created by parties, reunions, conferences and sessions. Eliot has evolved for himself a sort of personal and idiosyncratic comedy of masks.

The taking up and dropping of rôles is of great importance. In the family patterns sisters are nearly always good, and brothers bad; women can be simply divided into goddesses and tarts, though they may assume disguises. Men take up public rôles and cower behind them; sons reject their parents at great cost, but if parents repudiate children, they are most

severely punished. Men in public life are usually better than artists, who tend to be mediocre. Relations with the dead are as important as relations with the living. There is no such things as accident; every act is part of a cosmic design.

The chief embarassment continues to be the supernatural. The cosmic jokes of *The Cocktail Party* and *The Confidential Clerk* are almost as unfortunate as Father Time; the religious games of the Libation and the descent of Mrs Guzzard show traces of misplaced facetiousness. The position is recovered in *The Elder Statesman*, where Mrs Piggott's stagey briskness conveys the insufferable patronage that is one of the humiliations reserved for decrepitude. The diabolic visitants here employ a crisp astringent accent, which seems to record that "the character and the author are speaking in unison". Even the music hall star, since she knows her man, can rise to epigram:

> *Your conscience was clear!*
> *I've very seldom heard people mention their consciences*
> *Except to observe that their conscience was clear. . . .*

The transparent valedictory quality of this play gives it a distinction which is not that of a work for the stage; all the characters are disembodied from the start. Monica, the only one to achieve a complete absolution of solitude, a complete capacity for love, finds that in her the "obstinate silent self" who is the unspeaking director of ordinary persons has been replaced by "a love that's lived in, but not looked at"; and "this love is silent".

Monica is the only character permitted to reach the emotional level of poetry; Mrs Cargill defines Lord Claverton as one of the Hollow Men ("Or did she say 'yellow'? I'm not quite sure.") He, who had become an idol to his daughter, is permitted at last to walk off the stage, after he has confessed himself and stripped off all his public rôles. The "broken-down actor" can then change into his own clothes and

speak as himself; Monica, too, released from the deep possessiveness that holds her back, can acknowledge her love. "The dead has poured out a blessing on the living."

The force of this play is concentrated in the last act. Claverton has to learn to live with his ghosts; "what he has to pass beyond are not the faults but the savagely unforgiving judge within him" (8).

Ordinary human love is the subject of initiation in this play, and no extraordinary vocation or distant quest.

In all the plays, what has been sought is the release from solitude, and from a sense of guilt that goes with it. For Harry it is "the solitude in the crowded desert", when the self is reduced to an eye, watching. For Celia, too, it is an "awareness of solitude":

> *a revelation about my relationship*
> *With everybody*

Colby, who does not seem to need people, needs yet to know his own identity—what he has it in him to be. Lord Claverton cannot bear company, but neither can he bear to be alone; he is afraid of "the private self" that may be met in solitude.

For the characters of the earlier plays, solitude is only to be overcome at great cost, and in the pursuit of a difficult quest. Edward and Lavinia come together in humility, knowing that they do not understand each other, but what they achieve is limited. They can

> *choose, whether to put on proper costumes*
> *Or huddle quickly into new disguises;*
> *They have, for the first time, somewhere to start from.*

The loneliness of the individual, which had been the theme of much of Eliot's lyric, is in itself a paradoxical subject for dramatic communication. The direct appeal to introspection is strong. Eliot's plays, even more thoroughly than

Yeats's, reveal a solitary man essaying a public art and for his purpose evolving a doctrine of masks. His plays consist of a single action, the distinctive act of choice; as such they offer a deep, incisive judgment with which the spectator may concur. It is as definition and judgment, rather than experience, that they are valid.

Eliot's dramas of responsibility and choice, based upon classical myth, have clearly much in common with the French theatre of Cocteau and Giraudoux, Sartre and Camus. The choice of the hero is an existentialist's choice. The drama is a drama of crisis. If it involves such depths of the self as can hardly be described, only recalled, it also involves the public world. Edward and Lavinia end by giving another Cocktail Party.

This attempt to retain an accepted structure goes with Eliot's experiments in verse, with his determined use of the traditional materials to hand. In the precarious and uncertain period during which he wrote, these explorations were needed. But for the last decade the theatre has been in revolt. Quite suddenly a breakthrough was achieved, and already Eliot's dramatic achievement has become a part of history.

NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

(1) Anouilh's *Beckett or the Honour of God* (1959). Christopher Fry wrote *Curtmantle* in 1961. Osborne's play on Luther may owe something to this tradition. Eliot was the first to see the parallel which early conflicts of church and state might supply to the modern totalitarian conflict.

(2) "A Letter to Ezra Pound", *The Townsman*, I (July, 1938), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), pp. 152–3.

(3) Hallie Flanagan, *Dynamo*, New York, 1943, p. 82. Quoted by Carol H. Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 62–3.

(4) D. W. Harding, "Progression of Theme in Eliot's Modern Plays" in *Experience into Words*, 1963.

(5) Her position as head of a woman's college points to her role as Athene, the presiding goddess in the *Oresteia's* final movement, on which story the play is based. Eliot also described Mrs Guzzard of *The Confidential Clerk* as "a cross between Pallas Athene and a suburban housewife".

(6) Jacques Guicharnaud, *Modern French Theatre*, Yale, 1961, p. 50.

(7) This is part of a review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, published in 1923. The comparison with Yeats's plays for dancers occurs in the course of the review.

(8) D. W. Harding, op. cit., p. 160. The connexion between the use of the Icon and the possession of a strong conscience (or superego) is very clear in Eliot's plays.

Chapter Ten

THE THEATRE TODAY

I THEATRE OF THE DREAM

THE drama has now become very openly and generally a "game" between the interior drama of the spectators and the action on the stage; the problem of communication is explicitly present. The very process by which drama works makes such exploration much easier in the theatre than in any other form of literature; for here the demonstration goes on within the statement, "as if a man should read the anatomy lecture upon himself". Theatre today represents an experimental exploration of the interior life, and its relation to the "public" world of objects and events. But it is not a return to the study of character.

> Modern drama goes far beyond Hume in rejecting the notion of personal identity; it does not believe in the existence, the being, the integrity of the person. The most brilliant modern dramatists have denied even the approximate coherence of the selves which trade under a single name. They do not believe in dialogue (1).

The audience is no longer led through an imaginative series of events, as in the theatre of Sartre or Eliot. As abstract painting dispenses with representation, so the theatre of the Dream dispenses with events in favour of the interior or fantasy world. There is little possibility of ironic detachment or appeal to judgment in this post-dramatic theatre; its public affiliations are of a more direct and primitive kind. The audience is nearer to the Bardic circle of medieval times, who listened to tales of marvels and ordeals, etayns and dragons.

From the existentialist theatre, this new theatre has in-

herited extreme violence. Murder in the most lurid form is often at the centre of the play; it is no longer Eliot's imaginary murder or Sartre's political assassinations, the torture of the police barracks, the savagery of war. Instead, senseless crimes of bizarre violence, dismemberment, cannibalism and monstrous perversions or mutilations represent infantile fantasies or acts of insanity. Such a progression becomes inevitable once an orderly sequence of events is abandoned; for nonsense can hold the attention only when it is violent. Since the basis of these plays is the irrational, unless they were monstrously horrific or bizarre, they would not engage the audience.

In the "theatre of Dionysus", which by the mid-nineteen-fifties had succeeded to the existentialist theatre in France, there is then a surrender to the "Absurd", in Camus's sense of the word. *La raison* has abdicated. Tension has disappeared, but anguish is left. The theatre of the Dionysiac has abandoned controlling devices and discursive thought; in defining the "Absurd", Camus was certainly attempting to contain it, whereas Ionesco is content to exemplify. The difference is one between estrangement and Dionysiac abandon. Sartre and Camus retain a sense of orientation and purpose; Genet and Ionesco do not.

A theatre which does not reflect but merely presents is inevitably far less literary than the existentialist theatre, or the theatre of myth which preceded it. Language has sunk to a subsidiary place; Beckett has written a play without words. For the language of dream is often wordless, and consists of objects, and components of our primary thinking; contemporary theatre is concerned with objects, and when externally seen, people are also treated as objects.

The search for the self, for a measure of identity has likewise been abandoned as a direct quest. In Duerrenmatt's *The Physicists* it is a subject of horrific farce. The lack of communication is of course no new theme for drama. It

may be recalled that in Chekhov characters do not hear or answer each other, but talk like Piaget's infants (2); in Andreyev a drama takes place inside one man's head; in Pirandello there is no coherence in the selves that trade under a single name. Strindberg, who saw all relationships in terms of conflict, has been retranslated by Adamov, whose plays, from *The Parody* onwards, have been frequently built on his personal dreams. *Professeur Taranne* is a transcription of a dream, in which the professor's identity is stolen from him; when he has to meet an accusation, his friends deny him, the world presents a face of complete indifference, and he ends by committing the act of indecent exposure of which he has been accused.

Elements of Strindberg, Pirandello, the literary influence of James Joyce and surrealism combine in these plays to create total disorder. Small, fragmented objects float through the air, as in the paintings of Salvator Dali—a flower pot, a pair of boots, a whistle. No human relationships are possible, since the characters are too fragmentary to form them.

These plays depict man at the extreme limit of his being, where, as Pinter has said, he "is pretty much alone". The action lies only in tension, waiting, menace, without the release of a deed—the special Ordeal of our time. Waiting for an undisclosed and uncertain catastrophe, the blind, paralytic, deaf characters within these plays evoke dark satellite selves within the audience; they appeal to and play upon those responses that are below the threshold of conscious apprehension.

Large gaps in the dialogue, deliberate verbal insufficiency indicate the area of conflict, where words must be groped for. It has already been pointed out in Chapter Two that anything which is articulated or suggested in verbal form is raised to a level where it may be ordered with a much more precise set of tools, since it becomes at least vaguely associated with a rational system. The theatre of dream

appears infantile and regressive in so far as its dark rôles of fantasy and violence are freed from the logic of ordinary perception. They can the more readily accommodate the primitive aspects of spectators' responses; yet in so far as they are related to common images (and the figures of this world provide a very restricted group) they effect some measure of adjustment.

In the preface to *L'Aveu* (1938) Adamov said, "All that I know of myself is that I suffer. And if I suffer it is because at the origin of myself there is separation, mutilation."

The chief image of man is that of the beggar, the tramp, or madman; the chief action is murder. The assumption of a fantasy world of aggressive horror is behind such plays as Ionesco's *The Lesson* and Genet's *The Maids*. Perhaps such fantasies have been played out in private often enough, but more recently, whole nations have been forced to live inside the fantasy world of someone else, a Hitler or a Stalin. For five years the whole of Western Europe lived in Hitler's fantasy world; this is why, in Ionesco's play, the mad professor at the end of the lesson puts on an armband with the swastika upon it. The consequences of living in fantasy worlds even in art have been put by Owen Barfield:

> they are appreciated by those who are themselves willing to make a move towards seeing the world that way, and ultimately therefore, seeing that kind of world. We should remember this, when we see pictures of a dog with six legs emerging from a vegetable marrow, or a woman with a motor bicycle for her left breast (3).

As Blake more epigrammatically put it, "We become what we behold".

The drama cannot, from the nature of things, become an abstract art; it must be representational and therefore employ distorted forms. Nonsense and violence have to be represented by human actors.

In the Theatre of the Dream there is nothing to drink but raw alcohol, for civilization is repudiated and the stimulus must grow ever stronger; the images, being comparatively primitive and therefore undifferentiated, allow little variety of response. Raw alcohol is stimulating but it does not train the palate. In the "estranged" theatre of the existentialists, a sparse and austere intellectual control was exerted by those who had known extreme violence, and had learnt discipline and responsibility in secret; the Theatre of the Dream is a reaction from this.

It is said that any great crisis may take a decade before its effects are registered in imaginative literature (4). After a stunning blow, time is needed to regain memory and a sense of identity. The Second World War, which Camus and Sartre recorded directly, in about a decade took imaginative form. What emerged was not, as in 1929, the horrors of battle, or war atrocities; it was the image of the Delinquent, the young criminal, the child from the wild gangs that roamed Italy and Germany; all that is represented in the career of Genet, "martyr" of the new theatre. The image of a prison, directly presented by Sartre in *No Exit*, *Men without Shadows*, and by Camus in *The Just*, becomes something else in Genet's *Death Watch*; in Beckett, Pinter, Gelber, it is an interior prison.

The clown Marcel Moreau, in one of his mimes depicts an invisible cage from which he slowly, persistently works his way out, gains human stature—only to find that outside is another invisible cage, of exactly the same kind.

Theatre of the Dream might be dated from 1953, when Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* appeared in French, and established an image and a theme. Adamov's *Theatre* was published the same year, Sartre's study of Genet had appeared a year before. None of the writers were young men; in 1953, Beckett was 47, Adamov 45, Genet 44 and Ionesco 39; all had been writing for some years without attracting attention.

Gradually, Beckett, Ionesco and Genet have established a lead over the other dramatists of the Left Bank.

Theatre of the Dream takes its form from the play-within-the-play. In *Waiting for Godot*, the chief characters are two stage clowns, playing some embryonic versions of the traditional clowns' scenes—the attempt to hang himself, losing his trousers. The limitless waste place with its single blasted tree is reminiscent of *Purgatory*. The invisible Godot may be a reminiscence of Balzac's omnicompetent M. Godeau; or the deity in an affectionate French diminutive (as in "Charlot") or a contemptuous Irish one (as in "boyo"). The clowns can only play at living and their games are trivial, but their brotherly love, though it is never looked at, remains assured. The double being, Pozzo-Lucky, opens up a deeper level ("Pozzo" means a well); their symbiosis is defined only by commands and babblings; the one is savagely dominating, the other abject. The angelic boy messenger—or messengers—is alien and his very identity uncertain; but his appearance belies the disquieting contradictions of his messages.

Beckett allows the audience a wide variety of interpretations; interpretations of Lucky and Pozzo have ranged from Id and Super Ego, Proletariat and Capitalist to Beckett and Joyce. The same freedom is not offered in any of his subsequent plays. The heroes become more and more derelict, more and more isolated, more and more derived from Joyce; if Gerty MacDowell and the Dublin sandhills are taken away from *Happy Days*, there is little left but Ionesco's conception of a world of encroaching objects (5).

In the plays of Ionesco, objects are more important than human beings, and all objects become hostile. The little horns that proclaim man is turning into a rhinoceros, Roberte's three noses and her extraordinary fecundity in laying eggs show matter encroaching upon life. In *The Bald Prima Donna* it is language which is the obstacle—in *The Lesson* this is complicated by the orgiastic frenzy of the killer. The ob-

jects that take possession of the stage—the growing corpse of *Amedée*, the furniture of *The New Tenant*—induce a panic which may become a joke; "When I want to write a tragedy, I make them laugh, when I write a comedy I make them cry," as Ionesco observed. Submission to a killer's knife by Berenger and the Pupil, submission to the family formula by Jacques is balanced by Berenger's later refusal to become a rhinoceros, even when all the rest of the human race has become transformed. He stands alone, bravely (like Bottom the Weaver) in a world of terrifying encroachments.

In two plays only does a certain respect for life inform the action. In *The Chairs*, the two old people, inhabiting a middle European past, share the tenderness of Beckett's clowns. Although the Orator who comes to proclaim their wonderful System to the imaginary audience turns out to be dumb, his appearance does not invalidate the rest of the play. In *Exit the King*, Ionesco is refashioning the deposition of Richard II, as the earlier playwrights refashioned Greek myth. This play of Shakespeare has long fascinated him, and from it he draws the ceremonious grandeur of deposition and death. Love and Necessity, the rival Queens, carry out the ritual of despoiling, which would be thoroughly in the vein of some late medieval writer. In this play Ionesco has reached a firm simplicity of outline, and a completely traditional theme. But whenever he sets out to convey a social message, as in *Rhinoceros*, he becomes heavy, banal, almost his own Orator. It is rather ironic to note that his attempts to *épater le bourgeois* have had their effect chiefly upon the emancipated sections of that same class. His inflation satisfies the craving for violence that lies in an affluent society, but his dream world does not stand up to confrontation with the world of events. It happened that I had been reading Ionesco when news came to me that a brilliant young friend had been murdered. His voice in such circumstances sounds absurdly

pompous and self-assertive; I turned to Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, to modesty and balance.

The life of Genet has been that of an outcast; a child thief and the subject of a life sentence, he has developed a whole inverted religion of death. In *The Maids*, the servants play at killing their mistress, and in *Death Watch* the highest admiration is reserved for the gratuitous killer, the negro Snowball. This diabolism, however thin beside that of great French poets, in *The Blacks* achieved a peculiar naïve success. The savagery of its opposition of black and white masks does not disguise the fact that Genet's characters, unlike those of Beckett and Ionesco, inhabit a recognizable social world, even if it is a highly simplified one. Genet's characters play games of murder which turn out to be earnest; the game he plays with his audience is dependent on a mixture of conjuring and shocks.

The comic-horrific mood of modern French drama is claimed to be "beyond tragedy"—it belongs to a world too disorganized for the affirmations that make part of the tragic paradox. Yet it is strongly reminiscent of the grotesque forms of later medieval art, which eventually, as in *Dr Faustus*, became assimilated into tragedy.

2 THE ENGLISH REVIVAL

The English dramatic revival dates from the mid fifties; *Look Back in Anger* appeared in 1956, and gave to an image already established its dramatic form. In America, the same year saw the Manifesto of the "Beat" poets—Ginsberg's *Howl*—and for a year or two all young writers of protest or revolt were classed together; Amis, Wain, Osborne and the unfortunate Colin Wilson in England; Kerouac, John Clellan Holmes, Ginsberg and Burroughs in America.

Osborne never again quite equalled the force of his figure of raw youth and suffering in Jimmy Porter. His self-pity,

his weak impulse to destroy and hurt, complementary to his wife's impulse to throw herself away, are designed to be provocative but they have no particular target. Jimmy Porter is a child casualty of the war before the last—the Spanish Civil War. "There aren't any good brave causes any more" he says, in the year of Suez. His torrents of invective are set off by Cliff, the decent Horatio to this Hamlet of the Butler Education Act, and by the Colonel, an honest man of good will, whose Army memories are of military bands in India. The heaviest invective is reserved for the Church.

It is only too easy to pounce on the absurdities of inverted snobbery, by which child-bearing can raise a girl to working class status; or the shrill self-righteousness that appears most absurdly in the dedication of a later play, *The World of Paul Slickey*:

> To the liars and self deceivers; those who daily deal out treachery; to those who handle their professions as instruments of debasement; to those who for a salary cheque or less, successfully betray my country; and to those who will do it for no inducement at all. In this bleak time, when such men have never had it so good, this entertainment is dedicated to their boredom, their incomprehension, their distaste.

The bloodthirsty antics that follow are close in spirit to those of St Trinian's; Osborne's protest represents that of the welfare state's beneficiaries, who, like children in an orphanage, have been issued with everything free except a sense of purpose. It registers the devaluation that this general issue implies; along with the free milk and the third class arts degree come all the risks of national and international catastrophes.

Osborne has great natural theatrical ability; he might be called a theatrical journalist, for he can quickly turn the mood of the day to the forms of the stage, and put it over. *Under*

Plain Cover is a suburban version of Genet, as *Luther* relies on Brecht's *Galileo*. Basically, Osborne is the entertainer he depicted in *Epitaph for George Dillon*; he is prepared to turn out film scripts, vehicles for actors—he himself began as actor—but his attempts to be shocking, the main device of engaging his audience, are really very conventional; the targets when provided turn out to be of an old-fashioned kind that, with a slight change of idiom, might have appealed to Shaw.

Harold Pinter, who like Osborne is an actor, but unlike Osborne has remained within the theatre as director, works at a far deeper imaginative level. The trap, the cage (which Beckett also used in *Endgame* and *Happy Days*) is the setting for *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party*, which all end on a punitive climax. Unfocused feelings of menace, the emergence of irrational guilt, fear and rage, mark a society in which the individual is unable to feel much true responsibility, and therefore little genuine guilt; these fears are the fruits of impotence and frustration.

Like the characters of the French theatre, Pinter's are blind, or paralysed, or inarticulate; the murderers, tramps and demented in Beckett and Pinter live in an ominous timeless moment. It is Faustus' last hour, but the clock never strikes, Godot does not come, we never learn who Monty is, or the the nature of the nameless organizations to which Ben and Gus, Goldberg and McCann are bound. Responsibility is reduced to anxiety, conscience to fear, lit by the weak blaze of undirected rage. The old beggar is given many names—Estragon, Davies, Barnabas; he may be a nameless dwarf.

The end remains "nobody's funeral, for there is no body to bury"; nor is there any possibility of tragic action. The characters float, like space travellers, in a sort of weightless imbalance. A void or gap, which begins at the level of the speech, surrounds each character. In Pinter, this does not merely signify a lack of context beyond and a pile of rubbish

within, but a sinister degree of mystification. In *The Birthday Party*, the two killers who penetrate to Stan's squalid seaside refuge break him down by a preposterous series of questions and insults, after getting him to obey the first simple command—to sit down. The bullying begins "What were you doing yesterday?" and rises to "Do you recognize an external force?" "Is the number 846 necessary or possible?", shot through with such insults as "Why do you pick your nose?" "You verminate the sheet of your birth" and finally:

> You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you. You're nothing but an odour!

When the old deck-chair man, Stan's landlord, makes a last protest as the victim leaves, spruce and speechless, he is threatened in turn:

GOLDBERG: Why don't you come with us, Mr Boles?
MCCANN: Yes, why don't you come with us?
GOLDBERG: Come with us to Monty. There's plenty of room in the car.
PATSY (broken): Stan, don't let them tell you what to do! (They exit.)

The Caretaker, Pinter's most successful play, presents much clearer rôles; the blustering cringing Davies, the cool technician Mick, with his dreams of interior furnishing out of glossy magazines, the touching beauty of his brother's stumbling mind. The poetry is in the pity. Unreal bargains and threats and demands are necessary to the Caretaker's marginal hold on existence:

DAVIES: I told him, I told him he . . . I said to him, you ain't heard the last of this, man; I said, don't you forget your brother. I told him you'd be coming along to sort him out. He don't know what he's started, doing that. Doing that to me. I said to him, I said to him, he'll be

along, your brother'll be along, he's got sense, not like you. . . .

The threat is Mick's natural accent, usually in the form of a question:

DAVIES: I tell you, he should go back where he come from!
MICK: Come from?
DAVIES: Yes.
MICK: Where did he come from?
DAVIES: Well . . . he . . . he. . . .
MICK: You get a bit out of your depth, sometimes, don't you?

In *The Dwarfs* a triangular group sustain much more precarious identities; in *The Lover*, a single pair go through a whole collection of rôles which they play with each other as a sexual game. The affinities of this play with Genet's are obvious.

In the centre of Pinter's early plays there is often a slatternly, maternal figure who stands for animal comfort and protection. In *A Slight Ache*, the wife is an all-powerful purveyor of security, and when she removes her attention from Edward, he takes the place of the beggar at their gate. Pinter's imaginative strength lies in the precision and control of the rhythms that guide the inarticulate speech of his characters; the effect is a poetic one, though it is not in the traditional sense poetry. Timing and pace are all important in his dialogue; it is oral literature that demands to be spoken aloud.

The audience at Pinter's plays are involved in a exciting but mysterious action, and are left with an unresolved or unconcluded puzzle. The effect of John Arden's best known play, *Serjeant Musgrove's Dance*, is also bewildering and contradictory. The protest of the soldier is a hackneyed theme on the modern stage, but the formality of this play, which is set in a northern town towards the end of last century, enforces the effect of its queer, surrealist story. The serjeant himself is a stupid, narrow fanatic, driven to rebellion by what he has

seen, but without the vision to do more than repeat the methods of his superiors, to opposite ends. As with Brecht's Mother Courage, his vitality and his crude determination attract, but he is not fully sympathetic, and the audience is not allowed to take sides either one way or the other with the mutinous soldiers in their anti-recruiting campaign, still less with the forces that oppose. The final result, as in Brecht, is sardonic but exhilarating.

Private fantasies have become a popular subject for quite conventional plays, such as *Billy Liar*, as well as nonsense plays, like those of N. F. Simpson. His *One Way Pendulum* is set partly in subtopia and partly at the Old Bailey, a model of which court has been built in the suburban sitting room.

Besides this imaginative drama, more naturalistic forms continue to protest against society in general, in the manner which Osborne initiated. Wesker, Delaney, Kops and Behan all present dominating mothers, lonely soldiers, and acts of sporadic violence. The all-powerful mother is a natural image in an age of general insecurity; the huge vague menace of international catastrophe is felt to be like a maternal threat to the infant—perhaps the most imaginative version of this fear is Ann Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, in which a gang of delinquent juveniles is presided over by a Kali-figure—an evil mother-goddess. Against this may be set the Lonely Soldier, trapped in outposts, bullied by N.C.Os, led on farcical exercises; these two figures represent power and helplessness, security and insecurity, comfort and discomfort. Such are the general relationships that modern drama is concerned to explore, and they are represented in scenic terms by mother's domain, the family's living room, and by the prisoner's cage. For the conscript Soldier, far from being a symbol of conquest, is the modern version of the Prisoner.

3 THE AMERICAN DREAM

The imaginative theatre was created in America in the nineteen-twenties by Eugène O'Neill, who, if his unpublished plays are included, wrote upwards of sixty dramas. O'Neill was the most Protean dramatist of his time; he began with "slices of life"—his own life as a merchant seaman—then flirted with Expressionism in *The Emperor Jones*; while in *The Great God Brown*, he resorted to masks.

Plays of love–hate relationship, like *Welded*, reflect his close study of Strindberg; *The Hairy Ape* and plays about negroes rely on a heavy emotional assault, in the cause of social justice. In his plays of New England, *Desire under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill evoked the legendary severity and starkness of that country in the heroic age of the Civil War. In the last play he boldly reworks classical myth against the New England background.

The vigour of O'Neill's writing lacks much qualification or fine shading; his technical virtuosity, his readiness to explore new forms, his natural gusto and violence give value to his massive output. In spite of many technical experiments, some of which were very curious, his style is basically naturalistic and he conceives character almost in the terms of a novelist.

After a twelve-year gap, O'Neill returned to the theatre with a gigantic drama, *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), a study of derelicts based on Gorki's *Lower Depths*. The last refuge where his outcasts nurse their dreams is

> the No Chance Saloon. It's Bedrock Bar. The End of the Line Café. The Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller. Don't you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? That's because it's the last harbour.

No more dirty hope (it is Hope's Saloon); only the complete freedom to dream about hope, in complete irresponsibility.

The eager peddler of ideals who comes to clean up the place finally breaks down and admits that he murdered his wife because of the incessant strain of meeting her goodness and forgiveness. It is the general atmosphere of decay, the posthumous calm of the whole group that makes the statement of this drama.

The same season that saw the production of *The Iceman Cometh* saw also Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947), and two years later appeared *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Here men are crushed by the demands of a society based on conformity and success; the inexorable pressure of family and public expectations are exposed, but the form of the plays seems actually to endorse it; they are very conventionally given to social protest. The fantasies of O'Neill's plays about Cornelius Melody, "hero of Talavera", and the theatrical family of *The Long Day's Journey into Night* are grosser and more broken up; the dramas of Tennessee Williams, who can enlarge the unsuccess story with powerful traditions of the Deep South, remain likewise within a regular pattern.

The difficulties of the dramatist in America are of a practical kind; and plays tend to be more conventional than other forms of literature. The *avant-garde* began their work in the lyric and the novel. The first literature of protest came from the "Beat" poets of the Pacific coast, the most affluent region of the Affluent Society. Grant Avenue, Venice West and Big Sur produced the prophets of total revolt. The destitute waif of Kerouac's novel, *The Subterraneans*, an Odyssey of San Francisco's "junkies", visits her analyst regularly. The disaffiliated, who substitute for success a cult of unsuccess, have taken over their critical position from the French (though sometimes the whole thing is more reminiscent of *La Bohême* than modern Paris), their peculiar vocabulary from the dope rings, their alternation of bland coolness and destructive fervour from delinquency. The gross inflation of self-esteem, the smashing of generally accepted idols provide an initiation

to anarchy. A non-disciplinary form of Zen Buddhism opens up metaphysical deeps for those who require them (6).

Ginsberg's Bardic poems, in a style which is Dionysiac, diffuse and highly repetitive, invite the audience to join in by a strong opening exclamation—*America!* begins, "America, I've given you all and now I'm nothing." This verse is made for performance. It carries apostrophe to the point where it begins to recall the ancient minstrels with their "Lo", even "Hwaet!" The jazz beat of repetitive, ecstatic assertion implies tolerance of the extreme forms of living—tolerance of psychosis, cultivation of trance and dream. Only a very affluent society indeed could admit this cult of unsuccess—which makes the language of its claims rather unconvincing. In the introduction to *Howl* William Carlos Williams wrote:

> Literally he has, from all the evidence, been through hell. . . . It is the belief in the art of poetry that has gone hand in hand with this man into his Golgotha, from that charnel house, similar in every way, to that of the Jews in the last war. But this is in our own country, our own fondest purlieus. . . . Hold back the edges of your gowns, Ladies, we are going through hell.

Jack Gelber's play *The Connexion* (1959) presents a group of drug addicts who are waiting for Cowboy, their negro "connexion" who brings the heroin. He appears at last, escorting a Salvation Army sister; she thinks the ritual for which the addicts depart one by one is some kind of baptism; at the end she admits to being frightened of dying and rolls up her sleeve to show the needle prick she received in hospital—the stigmata that they share.

At intervals the play is broken into by a set of jazz musicians who are also waiting for a "fix", and by the author, theatre director and a couple of camera men, who get involved with Cowboy and his trade. Play-within-the-play provides some

action to relieve the motionless tension of the waiting group, who are stupified yet consumed with craving. They are victims of society, whose sufferings have been laid on them by the "absurdity" of events; exposed to the indifferent eye of the camera, they are more deprived even than the inhabitants of Harry Hope's saloon, since they have lost their peace.

Gelber depends on provoking and involving the audience in a manner that should by now be familiar. The play is otherwise almost a documentary, the record of the addicts. It neither comments nor judges openly.

The unmasking of society by Edward Albee uses techniques which are close to those of Pinter. In *The Zoo Story* (1958), the bourgeois is induced to knife the outcast; in *The American Dream* (1960), all the clichés of cosy success are paraded—the lovely apartment, the desire for successful children; the theme of this play is repeated with much greater mastery in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), where successive acts expose the depths of what at first seems a familiar story. A second-rate history professor, who has married the daughter of the college president, is humiliated by her in front of a couple of young newcomers to the campus. But the end of the all-night party shows the husband in command of his hysterical alcoholic wife; she has been rejected by her father and they have reassured each other with a secret game in which they invent a supremely successful young son. Martha, however, mentions this imaginary child to the others, and in revenge George announces that he has been killed in a motor smash. Anything which can be corroborated by an outsider must be true, according to the rules of the game, and the younger woman confirms that a telegram has arrived. The continuous exploration of hatred between husband and wife—it begins with a mock murder—recalls the furious games of the brothel in Genet's *The Balcony* rather than the fantasies of Pinter's *Lovers*; but Albee's scene remains

cosily domestic throughout. Circling round, probing each other's defences, changing the rules of the game, the two fighters take up one pretence after another, assume successively the rôles of bully, mentor, servant, lecher, indifferent scholar. George sits down to a book while his wife and her guest retire for an amorous session; Martha is coaxed into a naïvely idyllic account of herself as a mother so that George may smash the image. The relationship that finally emerges as basic in this strange marriage is one of complete inner destitution and yet of mutual trust—a symbiosis based on failure.

The usual setting for any American drama seems to remain that of the single family. Only a very fluid society would provide so many roles to discard; yet behind them all there remains a certain solid acceptance of the basic family group—parents and children, husbands and wives. Here is no "metaphysical questioning" of the selves that trade under a single name; nor is there any doubt that in spite of their many disguises, George and Martha can communicate with the very finest precision. The dream is one they can share. Yet the pattern is formal, with ironic echoes of older myths. George and Martha—these names evoke the memory of America's primal parents, George and Martha Washington; but as the ritual drinking proceeds, the rôles expand to those of Sky Father and Earth Mother. The Sky Father of the Greeks devoured his children; by claiming that he ate the telegram announcing his son's death, George meets Martha's challenge to produce evidence for his story; at the same time, the manner of this death is taken from the climax of George's first novel, which he had been forced to suppress (or devour) by his father-in-law. The murder of the dream child avenges the death of the brain child.

CONCLUSION

In spite of its present success and its undoubted power, I doubt if the Theatre of the dream is likely to persist. This is because it has put what was formerly the latent content of a play in the position of being its overt subject, which leaves as latent content a good deal that can not be transferred.

Antitheatre could not exist if there were no theatre to protest against; in this way, it is parasitic. Ionesco's dependence on Shakespeare in *Exit the King* is a case in point. Theatre of the Dream has a profound although unacknowledged relation to the society from which the dream material of which it composed arises. Pinter and Arden are recognizably caricaturing British suburbia, Genet the French bourgeoisie, Albee the American dream. Their drama is loaded with fantasy and therefore unconsciously dependent on all the social considerations that are overtly excluded, at least by the first two. Except to an audience familiar with the society which is assumed as the background to these plays of nonsense and violence, they would be not only incomprehensible but devoid of emotional charge, words spoken without power to communicate. As the poets of the "Beat" generation are imaginable only in an affluent society (a society of poor whites or beggars would be quite unable to understand the cult of beggary), so this chaotic disorder is possible only in an environment which is, even if temporarily, secure.

If read or seen in the context of real violence, it seems improbable that the plays would work. On the one hand, these writers challenge reality too closely by their violence and on the other they are too sharply dissociated from it by the devices of "antitheatre". In so far as these plays are valid art, therefore, I would expect them to be ephemeral, perishable, like the Jacobean masque, African mud sculpture or Japanese flower arrangements. What is overtly presented in these plays is the waking dream, the unconscious aspects of daily

living, and therefore what is implicit will be increasingly inaccessible, that is, the ordinary habits and assumptions of society. This will reduce the emotional force of the plays.

While the attempt to portray man "at the extreme edge of his living" is a triumph of recovery and recall, it is also unlikely that any playwright would be able to sustain this type of creation for very long. Adamov and Ionesco have already abandoned the extremes of irrationality for a more rational framework. One man's capacity for invention in this area, being dependent on his own fantasy, is likely to be limited. There is a great deal more variety in the outer society than the inner society, and nonsense tends to become repetitive.

If the "games" of our new society themselves become the subject of this sort of play, it may, however, develop conventions of its own. The sexual games of *The Balcony*, *The Lover* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* belong to a recognizable if bizarre area of general experience.

The "Happenings" of the Parisian studios are an old form of game; the middle ages called them "Marvels" and expected them to precede a feast. The chief characteristic of a Marvel is that its appearance is unexpected, its form unceremonious, and that it erupts into some formal occasion with a pleasurable shock, not unmixed with the horrific. This revival of a "game" in the theatre confirms that the writer's rôle is declining in favour of the mime, and the more primitive languages which are put forward by the advocates of "total theatre". If so, the return to non-verbal forms of communication can only be regarded as part of the general concern for the inarticulate, the partially expressed, which the language of the modern theatre, based so largely on what is *not* said, might also be held to display.

There has been great theatre in the past where the poet's imaginative art played little or no part. It would be unwarrantable to confine great theatre to great poetic drama. However, it seems to me that poetic drama is not only per-

manent, it is also more deeply permeative of the audience's minds; and it is the tradition of this kind of drama that I have attempted to recall.

And if at the present moment imaginative drama seems largely concerned with the inarticulate, the irrational, the borderlands of consciousness, this indicates, I think, a process of reclamation. The functions of language are being extended and the inner self is becoming accessible, not in the limited vocabulary of scientific description, but in common words and for ordinary recognition. As in any living structure, the point of weakness and incompleteness is often the growing point, so it may be that the very limitations of dramatic speech at this time are an index not of failure but of achievement.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TEN

(1) Denis Donoghue, in *The Listener*, 12 July 1962.

(2) Jean Piaget, *Language and Thought of the Child* and *Judgment and Reasoning in the Child*, records the conversations of small children to prove that their "conversations" are largely not intended to communicate, but are a series of running comments, boasts, imaginary events.

(3) Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, 1957, p. 146. This account of the development of self-consciousness is pertinent to the whole question of dramatic response.

(4) Gertude Stein made this observation about the effects of the First World War, in a paper she once gave at Oxford.

(5) The connexions between Ionesco and Beckett are interesting; *Embers* (1959) seems to contain an indirect reflexion of *The Lesson*. The encroaching objects of Ionesco are at their most powerful in *The New Tenant*, and for Beckett in *Happy Days*, which carried further the imprisonment of Nagg and Nell in *Endgame*.

(6) So quickly does the American system digest revolt that a college teacher's book of extracts from Beat poetry appeared in 1961, complete with bibliography and a list of questions for classwork; these included:

An essay on Zen Buddhism, using an encyclopedia article and one book.

A definition of 'Bohemian' and a list of five books relevant to the problem of defining the term.

A comparison of the first part of Ginsberg's *Howl* with Whitman's *Respondez! respondez!*

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